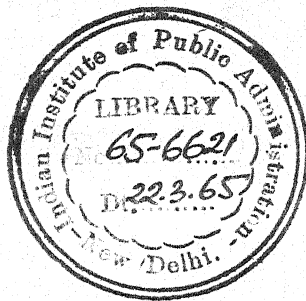


# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER



## PROCEEDINGS OF A CONFERENCE (HYDERABAD—DECEMBER 16 & 17, 1961)



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## FOREWORD

The District Officer has occupied a pivotal position in Indian administration for a century and half. The importance of this office at the district level continued unchallenged, notwithstanding some diminution in its powers, till the introduction of the Panchayati Raj which, inaugurated in 1959, has by now covered most of the States. The pattern of administration consequent upon the establishment of the Panchayati Raj has raised the fundamental question of the future role and status of the officers headed by the Collector in the field of district administration. It was in this context that the Indian Institute of Public Administration thought it desirable to convene a conference on the Changing Role of the District Officer at Hyderabad on December 16 and 17, 1961. The proceedings of the Conference are contained in this volume.

The volume contains a short introduction, the working papers, the inaugural address, a report of the discussions and a number of papers giving factual information regarding the position of the District Officer in different States. It is hoped that the pages that follow will be found useful by all students of public administration in India.

Dr. Amreshwar Avasthi, Professor of Public Administration in the Indian School of Public Administration, has edited these proceedings for publication.

NEW DELHI,  
January 20, 1964.

V. K. N. MENON  
*Director*  
*Indian Institute of Public Administration*



## INTRODUCTION

The DISTRICT is the key unit of the State administration in India. There is no State or Territory which does not have districts; there are in all 342 of them all over the country. But their size and population vary from one State to the other. A district, on an average, covers an area of 3,194 square miles and has a population of 13 lakhs. The largest district (Jammu & Kashmir) has an area of 47,282 square miles, while the smallest one (Dadra in the Union Territory of Nagar Haveli) covers an area of only 289 square miles. The average number of villages included in a district is 1631.8. There is also a big variation in both area and population as between the different districts within a State itself. For example, the largest district has an area in square miles of 4,372 in U.P., 9,972 in Maharashtra, and 7,063 in Madras, while the smallest district has an area of 895,2,429 and 648 square miles respectively. The range of variation in population is 2,238,588 to 102,246 in U.P.; 2,996,267 to 583,903 in Maharashtra; and 3,371,769 to 826,380 in Madras.

The district has, at the helm of its administration, an officer variously known as the Collector or Deputy Commissioner or the District Officer. However, this august office, which formed the backbone of the British administration in India, has experienced many ups and downs during the course of its history of nearly two centuries, and once again the office is facing a strong challenge. The introduction in the district of the pattern of administration, consequent upon the establishment of Panchayati Raj in most of the States, has raised the fundamental question of the future role and status of the revenue officers headed by the Collector in the field of district administration.

It was against this background that the Institute decided to organise a Conference on the Changing Role of the District Officer at Hyderabad on December 16 and 17, 1961. In fact, the Director of the Institute had announced at the Bhubaneswar Conference (April 8-9, 1961) the Institute's proposal to hold a conference on that subject at Hyderabad towards the end of the year. The Conference

met in the Jubilee Hall at Hyderabad on December 16 and 17, 1961 under the chairmanship of Shri M. P. Pai (Chief Secretary to Andhra Pradesh Government), Chairman of the Regional Branch of the Indian Institute of Public Administration. Delegates from ten States attended the Conference. The States of Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Maharashtra and Mysore were not represented at the Conference. The Indian Institute of Public Administration was represented by Prof. V. K. N. Menon, and Dr. A. Avasthi. The two distinguished invitees present at all the sessions were Shri P. S. Rau, a retired civilian of considerable and varied experience and Shri R. L. Gupta, Principal of the Administrative Staff College, Hyderabad.

The Conference met in inaugural session on the morning of the 16th December and was addressed by Shri P. S. Rau. The topics discussed on that day were: District Officer as Collector and Magistrate, District Officer under the scheme of Democratic Decentralisation and District Officer in relation to other district officials. On the following day, i.e., the 17th December, the Conference discussed the remaining two topics, viz. Residuary Functions of the District Officer and his Workload and District Officer: Recruitment and Training.

### Issues

At the beginning of the Conference it was decided to break up the subject into the following topics for discussion :

- I. District Officer as Collector and Magistrate.
- II. District Officer under the scheme of Democratic Decentralisation.
- III. District Officer in relation to other district officials.
- IV. Residuary Functions of the District Officer and his Workload.
- V. District Officer: Recruitment and Training.

## Conclusions

We shall now briefly indicate the trend of opinion that crystallised as a result of discussions on various issues.

### I. District Officer as Collector and Magistrate

The topic was discussed under the following heads :

- (a) How exactly has the role of the District Officer changed as revenue officer, as magistrate and as an agent or representative of State Government?
- (b) What are the factors which have contributed to this change?
- (c) What are the trends now discernible that are likely to have the most significant effect in the future?

Summing up the discussion on the topic, Shri P. S. Rau observed that there was unanimity in respect of one thing, *viz.*, that the functions of the Collector and his position had been continuously changing according to the circumstances of the country. The functions of the Collector to-day were not the same as they were in Elphinstone's time. The speaker agreed with other participants that the Collector's role had changed, has been changing and would change and all subscribed to that innocuous statement. He further felt that there was also unanimity of opinion that the position of the Collector had not yet deteriorated. Towards the end of the Second World War, he continued, various developmental activities had been started and these have been on the increase ever since. Since Independence they had naturally grown a great deal and the Collector's position *vis-a-vis* these departments had also changed appreciably. The Collector would continue to be the mainspring of these operations—whether he was President or a senior member of the Zila Parishad, or whether he voted or not.

Concluding, he remarked, "since Independence, and with the establishment of parliamentary government, Collectors have come to be entrusted with more and more onerous duties and they should try to enlist the cooperation and assistance of leaders of the countryside and that will make their position easier. I agree with the view expressed by others that with the onset of democratic decentralisation, the Collectors will have necessarily to seek the cooperation of the leaders in the countryside.

It is my opinion that the Collector does not work for personal aggrandisement or for personal glorification or satisfaction, and we have to make him feel that he has got the assurance of co-operation to discharge his duties with which he has been charged."

### II. District Officer under the scheme of Democratic Decentralisation

The topic was discussed under the following heads :

- (a) Should the District Officer be in or out of the Panchayati Raj institutions?
- (b) Should he act as a supervisor or adviser or participant or principal executive officer of these institutions?
- (c) What has been the impact of democratic decentralisation on the powers and position of the District Officer?

Summing up the discussion on this topic, the Chairman (Shri M. P. Pai) remarked that there was no common pattern of democratic decentralisation and so it became difficult to decide what was the best role for the Collector to play. Pattern differed from State to State. Some States had yet to set up these bodies. In Madras they were consultative or advisory. In Andhra and in Rajasthan they were executive bodies which had programmes to implement and policies to settle. The Chairman said that the general view would appear to be that if the bodies were consultative or advisory, it would be of advantage for the Collector to come in some capacity, preferably as the Chairman. On the other hand, he added, if they were to be executive bodies, if they not only laid down policies and framed plans but also were responsible for the execution of these plans, then much would depend upon whether these bodies would be merely deliberative and leave the execution to somebody else or they would also take execution on to themselves.

Concluding, the Chairman said, "so far as I can see, the general view is that if the bodies are deliberative, if they merely frame policies and plans, then execution should be handed over to a senior officer of the I. A. S. and the Collector should stay outside as a friend, philosopher and guide, but should be in a position to intervene if necessary without being a party to the decisions which are taken. On the other hand, if they are to be, as in Andhra Pradesh, bodies which frame policies and settle plans and

also execute them, then there arises a little difference of view. One view is that the Collector for various reasons should have the position which he now has. Another view is that it will be logical to make the non-official President responsible not only for the deliberations of the body, not only for the framing of policies and plans but also for carrying them out. But before any firm view can be offered on this, one has to know what exactly is going to be the pattern of democratic decentralisation. For the present, we have to find a solution which is best suited to bring the public into all developmental plans."

### III. District Officer in relation to other district officials

The topic was discussed under the following heads :

- (a) Whether the Collector should be the captain of a team of officers exercising executive powers?
- (b) Whether he should be a mere coordinator without being responsible for the execution of various programmes?
- (c) Should he merely be the watchdog of the Government?

Summing up the discussion on the topic, Shri P. S. Rau observed that they had come to a general conclusion on two points. Regarding the confidential rolls, he said, the practice had now crystallised that the Deputy Commissioner should write the rolls of the various officers. The confidential rolls of the Superintendent of Police used to be written by the District Magistrate from the time the system came into existence. Referring to the lines quoted by one of the speakers from the Royal Commission Report (1909), the speaker observed that the same point was reproduced in the Government of India Act, 1935 and thus became the law "The Deputy Commissioner" he said "has concern with the internal working of the police department. If he has any complaint to make about the conduct of a police officer, he has first to make it to the Superintendent of Police and ask him to take action against the concerned officer. If he is dissatisfied, he has to write to the I. G. (Police). As regards inspection of police stations, the Deputy Commissioners used to inspect them previously, but now-a-days nobody bothers about it."

As regards the question whether he should be the captain or co-ordinator, the speaker

observed that the word 'Captain' meant somebody who had authority, who could order about. This would, he opined, make the position of the Collector impossible. "It will be impossible" he concluded "in actual practice for the Collector to enforce orders. For instance, he cannot tell the Executive Engineer to attend to this road or that road. If he is made the captain, it will be quite impossible for the Collector to carry on; his work will suffer and his utility will be impaired. Therefore, he should be given the right to co-ordinate, to advise and guide." He expressed the view that the Collector should only be the co-ordinator.

### IV. Residuary Functions and the Workload of the District Officer

Questions discussed under this topic were :

- (a) Whether the Collector was overburdened today?
- (b) If he was overburdened, what could be done to give him adequate relief?
- (c) Whether adequate relief should be given in the shape of breaking the districts into smaller units or alternatively by giving him a high-powered lieutenant?
- (d) Whether it would be better to transfer quasi-judicial functions to a separate judicial officer?

On the suggestion of the Chairman it was decided to leave out of discussion two matters, namely, separation of the judiciary from the executive and the relationship of the District Magistrate with the police.

It was agreed that the Collector was overburdened and that adequate steps should be taken to give him some relief or assistance. The various alternatives to bring about the desired result were discussed critically. Thus, the formation of small, compact and viable districts was agreed to in principle. It was, however, recognised that the redrawing of the boundaries of districts was not a simple exercise in arithmetic and was likely to be surcharged with emotional, political and local considerations. As regards the suggestion to divest him of duties with reference to revenue administration, there was a consensus that quasi-judicial and executive powers in revenue administration should not be taken away from him in toto. It was in his capacity as revenue officer that he came in close contact with the people and gained a variety

of experience which has been the peculiarity and strength of his office.

There was general agreement that the Collector should be given assistance in the shape of Additional Collector or Joint Collector or some such officer. It was pointed out that almost all the States have given some such assistance to the Collector for some time past. Land Reforms and Tenancy Acts and even the Criminal Procedure Code empower the State Governments to invest other officers with some of the functions of the district Officer.

#### *V. District Officer : Recruitment and Training*

Recruitment—Issues discussed under this topic were :

- (a) How should the gap in the strength of the Indian Administrative Service be filled up ?
  - (i) Should there be a relaxation of the "minimum rank" rule?
  - (ii) Should there be an increase in the quota of promotion from the State services?
  - (iii) Should there be special examination for recruitment to the I.A.S. from the open market or a limited competitive examination?

Introducing the subject the Chairman observed that the gap in the rank of the Indian Administrative Service all over India was of the order of 350. If they were to stick to the rule that no one coming below the 75th rank was of necessary calibre, then a measure of recruitment through other means was inevitable. The question was whether they should get them by having a limited competition among Government servants under the age of 30 whose administrative record was known, or whether it should be by a special open market recruitment, or by a combination of all the three measures. Open market recruitment, he said, was likely to fail for the reason that the plums in private industry were getting brighter and brighter, and the man who was successful in industry, would not switch his horse in his 35th or 40th year. In fact, the tendency was the other way round. Even when recruitment was made for the Industrial Administrative Service, the response was not encouraging.

Some speakers made out a strong case for an increase in the quota of promotion from the State services. Speaking from personal expe-

rience, a delegate submitted that simply because one had started his career in the lower rung, he should not be looked down upon. Giving his own example as one coming from the ranks, he said that he had been given exceedingly good training in the practical field and added that administrators should know the art of getting on with the people as much as they had learnt the art of getting on with the office work.

Prof. V. K. N. Menon's observations in this respect deserve reiteration, "I do not see why a combined system of limited promotion by examination and special recruitment cannot be tried and why one should be only an alternative to the other. The people who came from outside have contributed valuable experience to our administrative system. While I do not like this to be completely given up, I am against any attempt to increase the quota to complete the cadre by a system of limited examination or promotion. I am also against bringing down the standard of those who have been taken by the All-India examination. But I think it is possible to devise a method combining these two—having some people from outside and taking a certain number of people by an examination from below. This would have the advantage of taking people from outside, probably compensating for what was a deficiency in the old I.C.S. system. There were two great merits which in the old days were recognised inside the administration as qualifying for a good civil servant. One was the capacity to put down a riot in the field and the other was his capacity to put up a note in the office. The old system was deficient in the sense that there was lack of sensitivity to the external environment. This deficiency can be supplied particularly by taking some people from outside. Though we are not familiar with this system because it does not exist in India and many other countries, yet I do not see why we should not have it in India taking a few people at different levels from outside."

#### *Training*

Issues discussed under this heading were :

- (a) Were the present arrangements for training adequate?
- (b) Should there be more frequent and more intensive in-service training?
- (c) Should the officers be sent abroad for training in order to broaden their vision?



Underlining the importance of training, one delegate stated, "the real crux of the problem was not so much recruitment as training. They might get a bright youngster, but if he did not get training it was no use. So many of the young recruits were not trained for the job properly, and this accounted for half the problem of inefficiency because they were unaccustomed to assuming responsibilities. If they were trained properly by senior officers and administrators who had sufficient training and experience, the chances were that the administration would become more efficient."

There was general agreement on the need for training but emphasis varied as to the pattern to be adopted. Intervening in the debate Prof. Menon observed : "It will be useful to modify the present system of initial training after recruitment. The recruits should not be taken to another college, but they should be sent to districts to get some practical experience for a few months; then they may be brought to the college; otherwise it will be merely continuation of the academic training that they undergo

in the universities. Practical training also in the present system is not very effective. I therefore suggest that those who are coming from universities may be sent to the districts first and those who come by promotion or by limited examination may be sent to a college or some institution like that at Mussoorie. There should not be merely initial training but also training in subsequent periods, once in 5 or 6 years to give the officers a refresher time." As regards sending these officers abroad, he disclosed that there was a scheme which the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi was discussing with the Ford Foundation, according to which about 20 District Officers or people at that level, at a particular age, would be sent abroad for a few months on a rapid world tour. "This would provide them with the benefit of this experience," he concluded.

A. AVASTHI

*Professor of Public Administration  
Indian School of Public Administration,  
New Delhi.*



## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

*Chairman : M. P. PAI*

*Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh.*

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. Andhra Pradesh   | .. K. N. Anantharaman,<br>Member, Board of Revenue.                             |
| 2.    "      "      | .. G. Narayana Chetty,<br>Director of Municipal Administration.                 |
| 3.    "      "      | .. Gopalrao Ekbote, M.L.A.,<br>Ex-Minister, Hyderabad.                          |
| 4.    "      "      | .. M. Lakshminarasayya,<br>Chairman, Hyderabad Zilla Parishad.                  |
| 5.    "      "      | .. C. Narsinhan,<br>Secretary, Planning and Local Administration<br>Department. |
| 6.    "      "      | .. Vasudeva Rao,<br>Collector, Hyderabad.                                       |
| 7.    "      "      | .. M. Sirajuddin, I.P. (retired),<br>Hyderabad.                                 |
| 8.    "      "      | .. K. M. Unnithan,<br>First Member, Board of Revenue.                           |
| 9.    "      "      | .. R. K. Vepa,<br>Collector, Nellore.   |
| 10.   "      "      | .. B. P. R. Vithal,<br>Registrar, Osmania University.                           |
| 11. Assam           | .. K. Saigal,<br>Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur.                                |
| 12. Jammu & Kashmir | .. N. Agha,<br>Commissioner, Srinagar.  |
| 13. Madhya Pradesh  | .. S. C. Varma,<br>Collector, Raipur.   |
| 14. Madras          | .. G. Ramchandran,<br>Collector, Coimbatore.                                    |
| 15. Orissa          | .. P. N. Mahanthi,<br>Divisional Commissioner, Sambhalpur.                      |
| 16. Punjab          | .. P. K. Kathpalia,<br>Deputy Commissioner, Kangra.                             |

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 17. Rajasthan   | .. T. N. Chaturvedi,<br>Collector, Ajmer.                                 |
| 18. Uttar Pradesh   | .. M. A. Quraishi,<br>Divisional Commissioner, Meerut Division            |
| 19. West Bengal   | .. A. K. Datta,<br>Collector, Nadia.                                      |
| 20. Indian Institute of Public Adminis-<br>tration, New Delhi | .. V. K. N. Menon,<br>Director.   |
| 21.    "    "    "    "                                       | .. Dr. A. Avasthi,<br>Assistant Professor of Public Administration.       |
| 22. Distinguished Invitees                                    | .. P. S. Rau,<br>Ex-Chairman, Damodar Valley Corporation.                 |
|   | .. R. L. Gupta,<br>Principal, Administrative Staff College,<br>Hyderabad. |

## WORKING PAPER (1)\*

During the first fifty years of its rule in India, the East India Company was engaged in experiments for devising a suitable system of land and revenue administration. With the arrival of Lord Cornwallis on the Indian scene a new leaven was added to the crucible of administrative experiments. He proposed to subject the Company's servants not merely as individuals but as a system of government to the rule of English constitutional principles. He consciously departed from the personal authoritarian tradition and based his work explicitly on the principles of the English political tradition.

This concept of government was bound to affect the office of the Collector who, in 1781, had been placed in charge of a district. In 1786, however, after many experiments, the final decision was taken as to the place the district and the district officer were to occupy in the scheme of local administration during British rule. Not that the area covered by a district was to remain unalterable nor that the powers of the district officer were to be static, but that the district as a unit of administration and the district officer as the head of the district, or in other words, as the "area specialist" came to be the cardinal feature of the Indian administrative system. This territorial arrangement, sanctified by administrative practice in the past in India, came to be better understood and appreciated by the people. The observations made by the Indian Statutory (Simon) Commission (1930) in this respect are relevant: "the system has some roots in the past. Akbar, for instance, subdivided all Bengal into Sarkars. But until the establishment of British rule, there never existed the settled administration, discipline and strong supervision which are essential if single officials are to be placed in charge of areas as large as Indian districts and allowed the degree of independence which has been given to the district officer within the limits imposed by law and precedent."

The district officer, under this arrangement, was placed incharge of a district, performing the

duties of a Revenue Collector, Judge and Magistrate. He had to assess and collect the revenue, try the civil and revenue cases, and was responsible for maintaining peace in the area in his charge. This combination of functions, which was recommended by the Court of Directors in consideration for its having "a tendency to simplicity, energy, justice and economy" was, however, in principle, disliked by Cornwallis. He considered that it gave too much authority to individuals whose character would form the sole security for the due exercise of his functions. Besides, he was accustomed to a mode of government under which the law was administered by a series of courts, and the duties of executive officials were reduced to a minimum. He accordingly resorted to the classic Whig division of powers, with its separation of the judiciary and the executive in the district in 1793.

In each district of the Bengal territory a Collector was appointed, who was designed to be merely what his name implied, not an all powerful discretionary official, but a mere collector of fixed public dues. He was given no political or magisterial authority, and was not even entrusted with the control of the district police. The great figure in the district, the true representative of the British Raj, was meant to be the District Judge and Magistrate. He was given the control of the police and a status and salary superior to that of the Collector. Henceforward, the Collector was to be only a fiscal agent, required to collect the fixed revenues from the Zemindars. It would not matter whether he knew much or little about the conditions of the people, about the extent of cultivation, or economic resources of the country. This came to be known as the Cornwallis system or the Bengal system of district administration.

The opposition to this system of district administration came surprisingly enough from the brilliant group of subordinates, who served Wellesley, viz., Munro, Malcolm, Elphinstone, and Matcalfe. There is a unity of thought in

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\* Prepared at the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi.

this group of men which makes it possible to speak of them as founders of a school of district administration. The visible achievement of this School was the 'ryotwari' system of land settlement and general administration. The views of this school on district administration may be put thus: "To the ryot, government must be represented simply, and not by a multiplicity of officers and a multiplicity of written forms, but by a single officer, who had powers to enquire, to judge, and to punish, without the delay and intricacies of the Western legal process." In practical terms this meant a concentration of powers, at least at the district level.

This school of district administration, also known as the Munro School, succeeded, to a great extent, in inducing efforts to reform the Bengal School of district administration. In 1829, Bentinck attempted for a while to restore the vigour of the administration by creating Commissioners with general authority over both revenue and judicial functions in groups of districts. Soon afterwards experiments were made in the direction of creating separate magistrates in each district so that for a while the normal district control was vested in a judge exercising both civil and criminal jurisdiction, a magistrate controlling the police, and a Collector collecting revenues. But, at last, on the urgent recommendations of Halliday, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, of Dalhousie, and of Canning, it was decided in 1859 to invest the Collector with the control of the police establishment. This meant the adoption in Bengal of the system of district administration which had grown up, a generation earlier, in Madras, Bombay, and Agra. Earlier, the Bengal Collector had remained shackled by the Zamindari settlement and bereft of revenue subordinates, who were the eyes and ears of the Collectors in other provinces. Thus, during the last hundred years between Plassey and Mutiny, "the wheel" remarks Perceival Griffiths "had turned full circle and the Company had come back to the old Mughal view that all executive power must be concentrated in the hands of the local representatives of the Government....Paternal and authoritarian rule had been restored."

The immediate response to the Mutiny was to bring the paternalist system to the height of favour in popular British estimation. The suddenness of the outbreak suggested that

British officials were out of touch with the people and this led to a reaction in favour of direct or personal system. The Punjab, which had been recently settled in a very direct and personal manner, had shown a remarkable loyalty to the Company, and the appointment of Sir John Lawrence as Viceroy in 1864 completed the triumph of this School. The decade which followed the Mutiny, was the heyday of the paternal system.

During the twenty years that followed the Mutiny, there was a rapid process of assimilation and unification throughout British India. The rule of law was soon established throughout the provinces, chiefly by the legislative activity of the Government of India, which from 1861 onwards poured out a series of enactments covering every side of Indian life. Subsequently, the various discretionary powers of the district officer were further whittled down by the establishment of highly centralised departments, and later still by the transfer of powers to such elected bodies as District Local Boards. All this legislative activity curtailed the executive authority of the District Officer, and his sphere of action was further reduced by the development of technical departments, not directly under his control and tending to become more and more centralised. This added to the rigidity of the administrative machine and made it difficult for the District Officer to mitigate those hardships, which must occur when ignorant villagers were first brought face to face with Western legal and commercial ideas.

The district administration, instead of being centred in one man, was divided amongst a number of European heads of departments, nearly all of whom looked to their provincial headquarters for orders. This was likely to lead to over-much correspondence, to neglect of the real work of administration and to loss of touch with the needs of the people under his charge. Perceiving danger, George Campbell, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal from 1871 to 1874, laid down emphatically the principle that heads of departments were on no account to dictate to District Officers, who, within their charge, should, subject to the control of their Commissioners, be supreme over everyone and everything except the courts of justice.

The close of the century witnessed a material increase in the authority of the Provincial Governments in matters of detail. The

growth of communications, the influence of telegraph, the spread of education, the growth of the press, the development of political interests—all tended to produce a growing uniformity of policy. More and more emphasis began to be laid on statistics, reports, and office work. Supervision became incomparably closer. The pressure of the Government of India upon the provinces and that of the provinces upon the district officers progressively increased as the century waned. Government became more a matter of method, of statistics, of general rules pressed into force over widening areas, than of personal judgment and influence. The District Officer gradually came to pass more of his time at headquarters, less on tour. The telegraph cut down the district officer's discretionary powers, just as it cut down the local Governor's and even the Governor-General's.

During the first two decades of the present century, however, in spite of gradual diminution of his authority and influence, the District Officer continued to be the head of the district and was much more than a *primus inter pares*. His position during those years may be described in the words of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report (1918): "The district officer has a dual capacity; as Collector he is head of the revenue organisation, and as magistrate he exercises general supervision over the inferior courts and, in particular, directs the police work.... This organisation, in the first place, serves its peculiar purpose of collecting the revenue and of keeping the peace.... Taken together these two agencies act as the general representatives of Government over the country to its remotest borders, and apart from them there is no other. Several other specialised services exist, with staff of their own.... These are controlled not by the district officer but by their own departmental heads; they may be regarded as different sets of strings connecting the Government with the people. But in varying degrees the district officer influences the policy in all these matters, and he is always there in the background to lend his support, or, if need be, to mediate between a specialised service and the people."

The introduction of constitutional reforms in 1921 further affected the traditional authority and status of the district officer. "The effect of the constitutional changes of 1921" says the Bengal Government Report on the

Working of the Reformed Constitution (1929) "on district administration may be described as the effect of the creation of a new power, the power of a Legislative Council in which the majority of the members are elected. This power has affected district administration in various ways." The Reforms placed the control of important departments in the hands of Ministers responsible to the Council, and in the districts set up persons who could influence the Government directly or through Legislative Council, instead of through the district officer. In other words, it brought political influences to bear upon district administration and thereby further changed the position of the old district authorities, modified the attitude of local self-governing bodies, and started a process of change in the attitude of the people towards Government. The result, unmistakably, was a narrowing of the area of activities of the district officer and a contraction of his influence both in relation to Government and in local affairs. And yet "he was far more than a functionary" says the Memorandum of the Government of Bihar and Orissa to the Indian Statutory Commission (1930), "through which the state acted. He was the authority to whom all, rich and poor alike, could appeal for remedy of wrongs, for protection against disease and for help in time of famine or flood. He was moreover the main dynamic force for advancing the prosperity of his charge."

The Indian Statutory Commission (1930) describes the position of the district heads of technical departments in those days in the following words: "Now-a-days each district has its body of district heads of departments each of whom looks to his own provincial departmental chief—the Inspector General of Prisons or Jails, the Surgeon-General, Chief Conservator of Forests or the Chief Engineer—for control." It subsequently recommends that "except in matters of pure routine the Collector must be informed of almost every activity in all these departments, because it must impinge at some point upon the operation of the primary government agency in the district." Describing the relationship between the District Officer in his capacity as District Magistrate and the District Superintendent of Police in the matter of law and order and the criminal administration of the District, the Statutory Commission noted as follows: "The District Magistrate as the chief executive authority in the district, is



primarily responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the criminal administration of the district, and for this purpose the police force is under his control and direction. The District Superintendent of Police is 'the District Magistrate's assistant for police purposes, and it is his duty to keep the latter fully informed...' His superiority over the police was thus clear and definite.

The introduction of Provincial Autonomy was yet another mile-stone in the long journey of the development of the office of the District Officer. Till 1937, the District Officer, as the representative of the Government, had to concentrate on the first essentials—public order, the swift administration of justice, the prompt payment of taxes moderately assessed, the maintenance of accurate and up to date land records which would prevent disputes. But by 1939, the emphasis had changed, and rural development, co-operative movement and village panchayats had come to enjoy primacy. The District Officer had to add to his innumerable duties "the maddening and infructuous business" to quote the picturesque language of Woodruff, "of answering questions, whether put down for formal answer in the House or sent informally direct, on the host of subjects included under the head of rural development, and the labour of persuading where he had been used to command." The period of dyarchy was one of great ordeal for the District Officer. The district heads of departments looked to their own ministers and departmental heads for instructions. Meanwhile the movement for the separation of the judicial and executive functions took on a political colour. In brief, it was the office of the District Officer which was under fire from many sides and its importance was at a low ebb.

Thus on the eve of Independence, in 1947, the District Officer had become, all over the country, a remarkable jack-of-all-trades, without any effective power of supervision and control over the activities of technical officers of the district. "The lot of the district officer", comments the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee Report, 1945 "like that of the comic opera police-man, is not a happy one. He is expected to see that nothing goes wrong in his district, but he has little power outside the Magistrate and Collector field to see that things go right. He is supposed to compose differences between other officers but he has no power to

impose his will upon the recalcitrant. He can cajole and persuade; he cannot compel. He is regarded as responsible for stimulating the activities of the officers of other departments, but he has no real control over them...." Dr. Paul H. Appleby also recorded, in his Report in 1953, that the district officer "was in earlier days, and is now somewhat in theory or in nostalgic yearning more or less responsible for everything done by government within his geographical area.... The result has been a halting and rather unclear removal of certain functions and personnel from his direct jurisdiction.... In a technical administrative sense no one is really responsible for anything of much importance and all share in responsibility for almost everything."

The Planning Commission, which also discovered some defects in the field of district administration, noted in its first report : "Over many years for fields of activity such as agriculture, cooperation, animal husbandry, forests, industries, etc., separate departments had grown up and established their own separate agencies for work in the districts.... The development departments did not maintain sufficient liaison between their various activities, and their officials frequently confessed failure either by pleading for more punitive powers or for greater assistance from the revenue administration... development activities in the district lacked unity of approach..." The Commission urged that the primary emphasis in district administration had to be on the implementation of development programme in close cooperation and with the active support of the people, and recommended that "the reorganisation of district administration has to provide for... integration of activities of various development departments in the district and the provision of common extension organisation."

This recommendation of the Planning Commission was based on the fact that "the district officer as the government's principal representative in touch with the people", "in control of the administration of law and order and revenue in the district" "held a coordinating responsibility for the activities of all departmental agencies within the district". "In the hierarchy of administration" the Commission added "he enjoyed status and power, which give him considerable influence over the local population." The District Officer thus came to acquire a key position in the hierarchy of



officers entrusted with functions of development and coordination. The Community Development Programme further highlighted this role of the District Officer and made him the leader and captain of a team of officers of development departments working at the district level. This led to the restoration of the District Officer to the position of the highest coordinating authority in his area and the one single representative of Government in that area to whom the people turned to have all their grievances redressed and difficulties removed, whatever the sphere—agriculture, water supply, education, health, law and order, etc. This was in contrast with the prevailing tendency, in the last days of the British rule, to weaken his power and influence as the head of the district. In fact, serious and concerted efforts have been made since and are being made to have for the district a single administrative head serving as a kind of general manager of all governmental activities in the area. “The main justification to my mind” remarks B. Mukherjee “of putting the Collector in the position of the captain of the team of Development Officers functioning at the district level is that we thus take full advantage of the prestige and position which the Collector has always enjoyed in the district.” There is no denying the fact that the District Officer has not been in the past a mere administrator of one narrow technical programme; his functions have been broad and diverse.

During the past six or seven years, various State Governments have redefined the functions and duties of the District Officer to enable him to fulfil the new role. A circular issued by the Government of Bihar, redefining the duties and functions of district officers, is indicative of the efforts made all over the country in this direction. “By virtue of his influence” runs the circular “as Magistrate and Collector the District Officer is best equipped to enlist the active support of the people in the successful implementation of any major programme of development, such as those under the Five Year Plans; and he can effectively coordinate the development and welfare activities of different departments.” The circular meticulously defines the pattern of control and adds. “The District Officer’s control over development and welfare activities in the district will generally conform to the pattern of District Magistrate’s control over the Police . . . . While the organisational, and professional or technical, control over deve-

lopmental officers of district rank will be that of the departmental superiors, the functional control in non-technical matters will be exercised, within certain limits, by the District Officer. The District Officer will not be burdened with routine matters, establishment duties and technical matters of which he might have little knowledge. He will only be responsible for ensuring :

- (a) that the development and welfare schemes are such as would meet the needs of the people;
- (b) that the time-table for various schemes are adhered to, and targets reached in time;
- (c) that there is no corruption;
- (d) that there is proper coordination, and difficulties in the execution of schemes are removed; and
- (e) that wherever necessary, people’s co-operation is secured.”

The District Officer in Bihar, and this is also true of other States, has been given substantial powers of administrative and disciplinary control over the District Heads of the various development departments of the Government. Now a copy of the tour programme and the application for casual leave of the District Heads of Development Departments are forwarded through the District Officer to the competent authorities and the concurrence of the District Officer is necessary in either case. The District Officer has the power to move a Head of the Department for the transfer of an officer of that Department working in the district. He has been further empowered to call for periodical progress reports from the Development Officers in his district, he can make observations on them, and can issue such instructions as he may consider necessary, though confining his observation to administrative matters. He is competent to call for a report, in the nature of an explanation, from a Development Officer in respect of any administrative matter and has been authorised to write annual confidential reports on work and conduct of Development Officers and forward the reports to the Heads of Departments concerned. These powers have made the District Officer an unrivalled chief of all the officers engaged in development activities, and an effective guide and coordinator of the developmental organisation at the district level. Thus, he is not only ultimately responsible for

maintaining law and order and collecting land revenue but has also become the chief of the District Heads of Departments where each functionary plays his role, giving the District Officer not only the status of the captain but much more than that.

The position of the District Officer, in the context of democratic decentralisation, requires careful examination and proper understanding. The Balwantray Mehta Team recommended : "the Collector will be the chairman of the Zila Parishad and one of his officers will be the secretary." It does not, however, automatically follow that every State is bound to give effect to this principle. Some States have the Collector as the chairman of the Zila Parishad, while others have him as the chairman of the Standing Committee of the Zila Parishad, as in Andhra Pradesh. There accrue some advantages if the Collector is made the Chairman of the Parishad. The Collector's valuable guidance and advice will be available to the Zila Parishad and his presence will add to the prestige of the body and coordination will be more effective and real. But there are some disadvantages flowing from this. It may be pointed out that the Collector's chairmanship may tend to develop bureaucratic element in the administration of the Zila Parishad and he may be inclined to support the Government's view to the detriment of the Parishad. What is relevant, however, is that the District Officer has now to play the role of a friend, guide and educator in all matters of community development. His rich experience and practical knowledge derived from the art of administration as the head of the district should be made available to the Zila Parishad some way or other.

It may be said that as a bureaucrat the powers of the District Officer have contracted a great deal in that his discretionary powers have become extremely limited; but as a development officer and coordinator, more powers and greater responsibility have been placed upon him than was ever done in the past. Shri V. T. Krishnamachari's remark in this connection is worth quoting. He has observed : "The collector's role has changed but not diminished, for he has to guide the democratic bodies. Often he has to carry conviction with the members of democratic institutions." The duties of the Collector in the State of Bihar in relation to Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads are laid down in the Bihar Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1961, as follows :

"The Collector shall render all reasonable assistance to the Panchayat Samitis and the Zila Parishads in the exercise of their powers and performance of their duties under this Act and shall, in particular—

- (i) exercise general supervision over the Block Development Officer;
- (ii) inspect periodically the work of the Block Development Officer;
- (iii) inspect and call for report affecting the Block from the Block Development Officer;
- (iv) ensure coordination between different departments of Government at the district level; and
- (v) exercise disciplinary control over all government servants in the Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samitis."

These provisions authorise him to ensure that the development programme in the district is implemented so as to secure benefits to all groups and areas in the district, enable him to be of great service to the Zila Parishad as its adviser and helper, the role which he is eminently suited to play because of his maturity and detachment, and add immensely to the prestige of his office in the estimation of the people.

One important trend which is markedly discernible in the evolution of Indian administrative system is that although, during the eighty years, new departments of a rather technical nature have been set up with their ramifications in the districts, the District Officer has continued to be the functionary in whom all threads of all local administration are collected directly or indirectly. Many were of opinion that an all-purposes officer like the District Officer might fit in only with a despotic organisation at the headquarters and would not suit a State Government in which different departments would be under different political heads each following a policy of its own in respect of its duties though the Cabinet and the Chief Minister might be the coordinating agencies. But the system had not materially changed either during the period of dyarchy or during the ten years that the Government of India Act, 1935, was in operation in the Provinces. Even the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee (1944-45) under Sir Archibald Rowlands felt all the more the need of a non-technical district administrator who would not only be responsible for the maintenance of law and order,

the collection of all revenues and government dues and similar other age-old functions of the District Officer, but would also undertake the work of development and planning in the district and coordinate the activities of different technical officers in this regard. The Committee agreed with the view of David Lilienthal and Luther Gulick that it was a common failing of the specialist that he would regard his own special line of work as the only thing important and would urge all the emphasis to be laid on it to the neglect of everything else. The Committee emphasised the need of a general administrator not only to coordinate the activities of different specialists and technical men but to bring a sense of proportion and realism to bear upon all that these technical officers might do. After a lapse of more than a decade since the Committee's report was published and after all the experience that we have derived during the last ten years from the working of democratic system in our country, it is futile to deny that the district officer is the chief instrument of stable and sound administration in the country. During the British rule he was the pivot and pillar of British imperialism in India. He has now to become the fulcrum of grass-root democracy, encouraging it, warning it and retaining the right to be consulted by it and even to override its decisions in certain circumstances.

The subject may now be divided for purposes of detailed discussion under the following four heads :

I. *The District Officer and the Popularly Elected Bodies :*

1. (a) Are there any differences under the Acts and Rules in the different States regarding the relationship of the District Officer with the Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samitis and the Panchayats?
- (b) Are any changes necessary in this respect?
2. (a) In view of the inauguration of the Panchayat Raj, should the District Officer still continue to be vested with developmental functions?

(b) Is there any incompatibility between the regulatory and developmental functions of the District Officer?

3. Will the Zila Parishad and other elected bodies not weaken the influence and authority of the District Officer in the discharge of his non-developmental functions?

II. *The District Officer and other Officials :*

1. What problems are there in the relationship of the District Officer as the captain of a team with the other officers at the district level?
2. What are the problems, if any, in the relationship of the District Officer with the officers at the Block and the Village level?
3. Are there any problems in the existing system of control of the District Officer by the Divisional Commissioners, the Board of Revenue and the Secretariat?

III. *The Role of the District Officer as Collector, Magistrate and Judge, and as a Repository of residuary authority :*

1. In what ways has recent land legislations affected the powers of the District Officer as Collector?
2. How have the relations between the Magistracy and the Police changed in recent years and with what results?
3. (a) To what extent have the Judicial (criminal) functions been taken away from the District Magistrate?
- (b) How has the separation worked in practice?

IV. *The future of the Office of the District Officer:*

1. In view of the changed role of the District Officer, is the present system of recruitment and training satisfactory?
2. Is the introduction of the Panchayat Raj the first step towards the full democratization of the district administration and the eventual disappearance of the District Officer in the traditional sense?

## WORKING PAPER (2)\*

### Factors involved in the Changing Role of the District Officer

There is, perhaps, no administrative post which reflects the nature and purposes of Government more completely than the post of the District Officer. When we consider, therefore, the changing role of the District Officer, we are, perhaps, compelled to deal with the changing role of Government itself in the life of the people. The tremendous growth in the range, and the complexity of the functions and duties of the District Officer in recent years is, therefore, nothing more than a reflection of the growth in the range and complexity of the functions of Government itself. There is a tendency to consider this growth in the functions of a Collector to be a consequence of independence and a necessary evil of political democracy. We would, however, be historically more correct if we concede that much of the increase in the range and complexity of the duties of a Collector is due to the necessities of modern society and not entirely to the compulsions of political democracy. It would, therefore, be useful to begin with an attempt to differentiate how much of the change that has occurred in the role of the Collector so far is due to :

(a) the influence of, what we may call, the modernization of society and therefore of administration which would include **Modernisation** industrialisation and a growing monetization of the rural economy. In parenthesis it may be said that it would be interesting to study how much of the so-called loss of prestige of the Collector is due to the release of democratic forces and how much of it is due merely to the passing away of feudalism and of "status" and the encroachments of a money economy. The three pillars that supported the office of the Collector's status were his revenue functions, his magisterial powers and his position as the representative of Government at the district level. With the decreasing role that land plays in matters of status in a non-feudal society, it is perhaps inevitable that

correspondingly the status of a Land Revenue officer should decrease. With the growing specialisation of the Police, as a crime preventing and crime detecting force and a growing awareness among the citizens of their rights under the rule of law and, of-course, with the separation of the judiciary from the executive, it was inevitable that the magisterial powers of a Collector should dwindle in importance. The real prop that remains, therefore, for the Collector is in that he continues to be the representative of Government at the district level. The interesting factor to analyse for the future will, therefore, be how far this claim is being affected in the Panchayati Raj structure. If the Zilla Parishad comes to be looked upon as Government at the district level, the prestige of the Collector will naturally decline further. If, on the other hand, it is looked upon merely as a local body then there is some chance that the Collector as the representative of the State Government at the local level will continue to be an important functionary;

(b) how far the change is due to the greater complexity of administrative organization and the greater governmental inter-

**Planning** ference that the concept of planning involves. Here, again, one interesting trend seems to be visible, namely, that so far as planning involves mobilisation of local resources and so far as the people can be motivated to achieve this mobilisation through their own organizations, the influence of the Collector diminishes. Whereas, where there is insufficient motivation or involvement of the people or where planning requires the use of external scarce resources necessitating regulation and rationing, the role of the Collector gains in importance. In this connection, the different versions with regard to the efficiency of distribution of certain commodities such as chemical fertilizers by local bodies would be interesting indicators; so would be the apprehensions expressed on occasions by Scheduled Castes with regard to the transfer of Social

\*Prepared by Shri B. P. R. Vithal, I.A.S., at the Regional Branch of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, Hyderabad.



Welfare work from official agencies to the elected bodies. These are trends that may under certain circumstances strengthen the role of a District Officer.

(c) the third factor is, of-course, the growth of democratic institutions at the district level.

This will, perhaps, be the **"Democratic Institutions"** most important and the most fateful factor. The importance of the Collector's position in the administrative structure depended on two factors :

- (i) the trust and confidence that the Government reposed in him as its representative at the district level, and
- (ii) the position of the Collector vis-a-vis the people in the district to whom he represented the only channel of communication with the Government above the district level.

Till the introduction of the Panchayati Raj most of the changes occurred only in the structure above the district level. No doubt, political democracy provided a number of alternate lines of communications from the district to the Government which did not necessarily have to pass through the District Officer, such as, for instance, the M.L.A. or the influential local politicians. Where the Collector previously was the eyes, ears and the hands of the Government he perhaps progressively ceased to be the only eyes and ears of the Government. Government acquired other eyes and ears in the shape of the M.L.A. and other people's representatives. But the hands of Government continued to be the District Officer, in the sense, that the Government had to act only through him. In other words, while the upward lines of communication had been duplicated and partly disrupted, the downward line of communication remained, more or less, the old one. Further, while this might have happened in practice, the theory continued to be that the Government relied on its District Officer ultimately for any unbiased picture of the state of affairs in the district. Most of the problems that the District Officers have faced so far have, therefore, been problems of contradictions between theory and practice. The Government continued to assert that it depended upon its District Officer in all matters relating to the district, even if it chose to by-pass or to over-rule him when it suited its convenience.

## The District Officer and Panchayati Raj Institutions

The introduction of Panchayati Raj, therefore, gives a formal shape to a trend that has already been in existence. To this extent, perhaps, the problem of change will be easier to face in the future than it has been in the past. The effect that the Panchayati Raj institutions will have on the role of the Collector will depend, to a large extent, upon our basic conceptions about these bodies themselves. At present, they have a dual role as local bodies and as agents of Government for execution of certain programmes. In their role as a local body, the function of the Collector can, at best, be only that of an inspecting officer or that of an expert adviser. In respect, however, of the functions that the Government have transferred to these bodies the role of the Collector requires to be clearly laid down. Is he to function as a representative of Government responsible in that capacity to Government for the execution of certain programmes, or, is he to consider himself merely as the head of the executive agency of the local body itself for these programmes?

In some States, like Andhra Pradesh, where Panchayati Raj has been introduced, in what we might call, a full-fledged or an extreme manner, there seems to be some blurring of the executive and deliberative functions. The position is not yet acute so far as the Collector is concerned, because of his being the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Zilla Parishad, so that he has a say in both the deliberative and the executive functions of the Zilla Parishad. But at the block level, the B.D.O. is in a different position and in a number of cases, the Presidents of the Samithis are already acting as if they are the chief executive authorities. Once at the district level, the Collector is replaced by a non-official as the Chairman of the Standing Committee—which is bound to happen in course of time—a similar problem will arise at the district level. What exactly would the role of the Collector then be? The two logical extremes would be, on the one hand, the present practice in Madras, where the Collector is the Chairman of the District Development Council and where the Council itself is of an advisory character; and, on the other, where the Collector himself will be the Secretary of the Zilla Parishad and as such its Chief Executive Officer. This does not seem to be the position anywhere, but it has the merit of being logical. Any other

position between these extremes is likely to be highly confused. The problem of the relations of the Collector with the Zilla Parishad, therefore, is :

- (a) Is he to be only a representative of the Government at the district level separated from the Zilla Parishad, not connected with its day-to-day functioning and, perhaps, performing only a periodic inspection and keeping Government apprised of the local situation ? or
- (b) Is he to be the Chief Executive authority of the Zilla Parishad? In such a case, the Government should not embarrass him by demanding any part of his loyalty directly. They must, in that case, have a separate inspecting agency of their own.

With regard to the relations with the lower bodies, namely, the Samithis and the Panchayats, the position will depend, to a great extent, upon the nature of relations between these bodies themselves. In most Panchayati Raj legislation, these bodies are mutually interlinked and the supervision of the lower body is done by the higher elected body. The question, therefore, is whether the staff of these bodies should be vertically organized upto the district level and placed under the District Officer or whether they should be horizontally linked with the respective institutions, i.e., the Parishads and Samithis. If they are so linked, the further question will be as to how supervision over them is to be effected. Can the official hierarchy supervise the different levels of officials directly or would this also have to be done through the respective peoples' institutions? The relations of the Collector with the Samithis and Panchayats will, therefore, depend upon his relations with the Zilla Parishad itself. If, he is not himself linked with the Zilla Parishad, then he could provide the inspecting agency for these bodies. If, on the other hand, he himself is intimately associated with the Zilla Parishad, would he then be in a position to be an effective agency for the inspection of the lower bodies?

#### **Relations with other District Officers**

With regard to the relations of the District Officer with the other district officers especially technical officers, there is first a larger problem which is a problem not only at the district level, but, perhaps, everywhere. Technical development has resulted in increasing specialization.

There has also been a re-action against the neglect of technical officers in the past and this has resulted in a general movement against the control of administrative officers over technical persons. Considerations, both of specialisation and of prestige, are, therefore, leading to more and more fragmentation. At the same time, the integrated nature of the problems in the rural areas and the necessities of planning require that co-ordination is constantly achieved at different levels. The only officer, who can achieve this co-ordination at the district level is the District Officer. Unfortunately, we, as a people, seem to be incapable of achieving co-ordination without a certain degree of subordination. Our psychology seems to require that the co-ordinator is never equal, but is always slightly higher than those whom he seeks to co-ordinate. It, therefore, seems necessary to place the District Officer in a controlling position over all other district officers, or to absolve him of the responsibility of co-ordination. The manner in which this control is to be achieved and the degree to which it is to be achieved—the extreme being the suggestion that all district officers form part of the same office of which the Collector is the head—have to be discussed and suitable solutions suggested. One suggestion, of course, is that the Zilla Parishad being a people's institution, provides the best forum for achieving this co-ordination. In practice, however, the role of Collector even in such an arrangement would have to be clearly defined.

The relations of the District Collector with the other district officers will, therefore, be connected with the whole question of Panchayati Raj institutions and the relations of District Officers themselves with these institutions. If responsibility for a number of functions is completely transferred to the Zilla Parishads, the logical conclusion would have to be to transfer the officers concerned also to the control of the Zilla Parishads. In such a case, the relations between the District Collector and the district officers will depend upon the District Collector's own relations with the Zilla Parishad. If he is an officer representing Government and is outside the Zilla Parishad, it would naturally be not possible for him to directly control those officers who might have been transferred to the Zilla Parishad. If, on the other hand, he himself is the Secretary of the Zilla Parishad, naturally he would have to be at the head of all the services of the Zilla Parishad.

The discussion may perhaps centre round the following issues :

- I. How exactly has the role of a District Officer changed? This may be discussed in relation to the three main aspects of the role of the District Officer :

- (a) As a Revenue Officer,
- (b) As a Magistrate,
- (c) As a representative of Government at the district level.

For various reasons the first two aspects seem to have decreased in importance, while a number of new responsibilities have arisen as a result of the third aspect.

- II. What are the factors that have contributed to the change so far? And to what extent has their effect been different in respect of the three aspects mentioned above?
- III. What are the trends now discernible that are likely to have the most significant effect in future on the role of the Collector?
- IV. The existing agency for supervision over the Collector has been based upon

the original concept of the Collector being a revenue officer and a representative of Government at the district level. It is for this reason that control over a Collector is exercised by the Board of Revenue on one side and the Chief Secretary on the other. This arrangement has been sought to be brought in line with the changed role of a Collector by making the Chief Secretary also in many cases the Development Commissioner. But with Panchayati Raj the position has to be again reviewed. How far, therefore, has the agency for supervision been revised and redesigned to cope with the changed situation in which the developmental responsibilities of a Collector far outweigh his responsibilities for revenue collection, and how effective is it proving?

- V. To what extent should the initial training programme be re-designed taking into account the changed role of the District Officer? What kinds of in-service training would be considered necessary to help officers adjust themselves to the changed role of the District Officer?

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

### (i) INAUGURAL SESSION

December 16, 1961

The Conference met at 9-30 A.M. in the Jubilee Hall. Shri M. Purushotham Pai (Chief Secretary), Chairman of the Regional Branch of the Institute, welcoming the delegates to the Conference, observed that Shri K. Brahmananda Reddi, who had agreed to inaugurate the Conference, had been held up at Delhi on very important business, and he had sent a telegram regretting his absence and wishing the Conference all success. However, they were extremely fortunate in having amidst them Shri P. S. Rau, who was taking the place of Shri Reddi. Shri Rau hardly needed any introduction to the audience. He was one of the most senior administrators, who had left his mark in various administrative fields in the country. It was hardly necessary to recapitulate the work done by Shri Rau in the Damodar Valley Corporation, Punjab and Kerala Governments and elsewhere. He would once again like to thank Shri Rau for stepping into the breach at very short notice and for having agreed to give them the benefit of his very long, wide and rich experience.

Prof. V. K. N. Menon, Director of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, in the course of his introductory remarks, stated that there was no need for him to say much on this occasion except to thank all of them for the trouble they had taken in coming over to the inaugural session of the Conference. On behalf of the Institute, and more particularly, its headquarters, he took the opportunity to thank one and all. He pointed out that the Institute organised every year a couple of conferences of this type either at headquarters or at some active regional centre like Hyderabad. The last one, he recalled, was held at Bhubaneswar on the subject of "Revenue Boards and Divisional Commissioners". They were now meeting to discuss the subject of "The Changing Role of the District Officer". He announced that the next Conference will be held at Jaipur on the subject of

"Official-Non-Official Relations in Panchayati Raj" some time in the end of March, 1962. In this way, he said, a series of conferences had been going on for the last five years and their proceedings were printed and distributed. He did hope that the printed records of the conferences had been useful, like many other activities of the Institute, in stimulating interest in public administration throughout India. He was, indeed, very grateful to the Government of Andhra Pradesh, particularly the Chief Secretary, for the very active interest he had taken in organising this Conference and for all the facilities given to make the Conference a success. He expressed the hope that their deliberations on two days would be very useful and throw much light on one of the very important problems of contemporary Indian administration. He thanked all once again for their presence at the function. He took the occasion to thank Shri P. S. Rau also, on behalf of the Institute, for the ready acceptance of their request to take the chair.

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Inaugurating the Conference, Shri P. S. Rau made the following speech :

"Of the legacies which the British left us on withdrawing from India, the most valuable, in my view, are a streamlined civil administration with the I.C.S. at its apex, the Indian Army and the Rule of Law.

In this country, the district has been the unit of administration for a long time and the Collector (Deputy Commissioner), as the head of the district, occupies a pivotal position and performs numerous functions. As Collector, he collects the land revenue, maintains the land records, which are of the utmost importance from the point of view of the villagers, and hears and decides appeals arising out of them. As District Magistrate, he used to be the head of the



District Magistracy, tried cases, heard appeals, but he no longer does these things now. Nowadays, as a result of the separation of the judiciary from the executive, his powers are exercised by an Additional District Magistrate, but he still remains District Magistrate in name, and for certain specific purposes is connected with law and order. He is head of the district police and controls the working of this department in the district, is in charge of law and order and keeps the peace. He co-ordinates and guides the activities of what have come to be called the development departments e.g., Agriculture, Co-operative, Forest, Irrigation, Buildings and Roads and other allied departments. Duties connected with these have tended to increase since the end of the Second World War, but since Independence have grown out of all proportions, tending to dwarf his other functions. How much power he exercises in these other departments is purely a matter of his personality, ability and his capacity to inspire confidence, for he has no statutory powers to over-rule his colleagues, being merely *primus inter pares*. I have known the Deputy Commissioners who were listened to with respect and the Deputy Commissioners who were not. The Deputy Commissioner is the representative of Government in the district responsible for the execution of its policies; he is the normal channel of communication between Government and the people; interprets the policy of Government to the people; conveys the feelings and reactions of the people to the Government. In short, he is generally regarded as the eyes and ears of Government. In the discharge of his functions, he was ably assisted by other All-India services like the Indian Medical Service, the Indian Services of Engineers, the Indian Agricultural Service and the Indian Forest Service, the members of which were carefully recruited from the best available material, though not by open competition. These, together with the Provincial and Subordinate Services as they used to be called, ran the administration of the country.

This roughly was the pattern of administration in what was British India and what exists also now by and large. In the Indian States, it was different. At one end of the scale were States like Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore and Baroda with administrations as competent as those of British Indian Provinces and at the other end were tiny States, three or four of which you would cover in a morning's brisk walk !

The intermediate States had different sorts of administrative set-up. For example, when I went to take charge of a large State in Rajasthan as Dewan (Prime Minister), I found to my horror that there was not even the semblance of district administration there. The almost sole civil functionary in the "mofussil" (in the country-side) was an officer styled 'Hakim' who was a Magistrate and Munsif. Many of these were usually found at the headquarters of the State and not at their own stations, and often people had to come in search of them ! So great apparently was the lure of the capital ! I said on arrival that all this must change. We must have districts, District Collectors, Sub-Divisional Officers and the other paraphernalia of district administration with which you and I are familiar. But I was told frankly, "Sir this has been tried before by so and so and by so and so (they mentioned the names of well-known Indian statesmen), but they failed." This was a fact, but I said that district administration was the one thing I knew and I knew it was good for the Maharaja's subjects, and if I could not establish it and establish it firmly, I had no place in the State; the sooner I returned to Delhi the better. I then immediately set about it, carved out districts, built offices and residences, not only for the Collectors, District Judges and Superintendents of Police, but also for Deputy Collectors, Tahsildars, some clerical personnel and peons. The people blessed me and everybody was pleased—even the officers, as they now had fairly commodious quarters to live in. Slightly different was the case in a Southern State where I happened to serve. There, there was no doubt a Deputy Commissioner, but he was only in name, an anaemic and almost ghost-like apparition, who was no more like the District Collector of our acquaintance than the man in the moon. The trouble with this Southern State was that very big people had been at its helm of affairs, so big that everybody else was dwarfed in comparison with them, and along with others the Collector was also dwarfed. District administration of our type was introduced at one stroke with the willing co-operation of all concerned, was well received by officers and public alike and before long it became a *fait accompli*, and has since been working reasonably well.

This system of administration has attracted the admiration of the world, because it was manned by a *corps d'elite* carefully selected as a result of an open competitive examination and

intensively trained and adequately remunerated. That it stood the strain of two world wars without any serious break-down is abiding testimony to its inherent strength and flexibility. Nor should it be forgotten that India is almost the only country in this part of the world which has weathered all the storms practically without turning a hair. A good deal of credit for this goes to the Services, All India, Provincial, Subordinate and Clerical, who have borne the brunt of the burden involved in steering the country through all the stresses and strains of the last fifteen years or more. The wind of change, however, had begun to blow and the movement for independence had gathered momentum. The wars in particular compelled Government to expand the scope of its activity and the administration which, by and large, had done little more than collect the land revenue, police the country-side and keep the peace, found itself attempting a number of things of which it had had no previous experience, such as fixing the prices, controlling the production and distribution of foodgrains and controlling a host of other essential commodities, such as cloth, cement, iron and steel etc. etc. This necessitated the multiplication and, therefore, dilution of governmental staffs to an unprecedented degree and the recruits were largely ill-educated, untrained, temporary and bound by no common traditions of loyalty or *esprit de corps*.

The consequences of this dilution of the administration were two : (1) too rapid promotion of personnel scarcely fit to occupy the new positions either by previous experience, qualifications, or character and (2) large increase in corruption. The latter is a direct consequence of the fall in moral standards brought about by the two world wars and is not peculiar to India, but is found throughout the world. Other and more domestic reasons are not far to seek. Where consumable articles are in short supply and control is imposed to ensure fair distribution, people eager to secure an advantage pay for what they need and corruption is inevitable. While it is agreed on all hands that corruption has greatly increased, it is felt in certain quarters that it is exaggerated. Indiscriminate platform denunciation of the services, their inefficiency, their corruption and alleged lack of integrity, particularly by those in authority merely serves to undermine morale and does more harm than good. It is frequently

not realised that the services are props on which Government stands and no Government can function properly or with prestige if in time and out of time the services are unceremoniously condemned. We gratefully acknowledge that latterly there has been a slight tendency to reverse this process. The heart of the administration is still sound. By all means reduce corruption by removing its causes and punishing the guilty, but do not make it appear that it is much more widely prevalent than it is. It must be admitted that our laws and rules have made it extraordinarily difficult to bring the guilty to book. In any case, it is not easy to detect corruption because both the parties involved are interested in keeping the matter secret, and bribe-taking officials are often very clever, and what is more, popular. In my first officiation as Collector, when I had barely five years service and when I used to take everybody at his face value, I happened to stumble upon an extremely clever, well-planned and widespread excise racket with the District Excise Officer at its head, and you should have heard the peans of praise he received from all and sundry, how he was a theosophist and God-fearing man, who would'n't hurt a fly, and they almost made it look as though the young and impetuous Deputy Commissioner was persecuting an innocent, efficient and God-fearing officer. Nowadays it is slightly different; as soon as a case of corruption is detected, the accused person proceeds to enlist political support, and cases are not unknown where this has eventually recoiled on the head of the detecting officer. No wonder, therefore, officers are chary of disturbing the hornets' nest, and some of them considering that discretion is the better part of valour even wink at such cases unless they are fool-proof. Corruption can be reduced only by improving the conditions of service, by removing temptations from the path of officials and by strong public opinion, which alas does not exist.

Half of our trouble flows from the fact that many of our administrative personnel are untrained for their jobs. The training of civil servants is an old idea and the British attached great importance to it. They had possessions in every part of the globe, and it was essential that civil servants sent out to various countries should be trained to discharge their duties satisfactorily. Take for instance the case of the I.C.S. Those candidates who came out successful

in the open competitive examination, were put through a fairly intensive course of training lasting for twelve months (2 years for those who passed out in India). The subjects taught were Indian Law, Indian History, the language of the State which the candidate was allotted—reading, writing, including manuscript reading, riding and so on. There was an examination at the end of this training period and cases are on record where a candidate who failed in this examination lost his appointment. We have continued this system in a slightly modified form and our young men who pass into the I.A.S. are being trained now in a college first in Delhi and now in Mussoorie. As different opinions are held about the I.A.S., I happened sometime ago to ask my friend, the Principal of the Training School, about the quality of the recruits. He gave me the reassuring answer that they were excellent material but should be trained well in the districts as we used to be. The I.P.S. candidates are being trained at Mount Abu. This is good as far as it goes. Under the old regime, great attention was paid to the practical training of the young officer. I can give you my own example which is by no means out of the ordinary. As soon as I joined service, my Deputy Commissioner who, by the way, was a Hyderabad, told me to get myself a horse. This I did with some difficulty as I had not too much money. Then I worked as a Patwari for a fortnight, as a Revenue Inspector for a fortnight, spent two or three weeks at each of the more important jobs in the Taluq office actually doing the work as a permanent incumbent would, went out on tour with the Sub-Divisional Officer and then with the Deputy Commissioner, incidentally being put through my paces in 'shikar'. The need for training has become infinitely more important as the places our young officers have to fill demand knowledge in spheres which did not fall to the lot of the older type of officer. He may now be called upon to manage a steel factory, an anti-biotic establishment, a multi-purpose project, controlling a river basin, providing irrigation, electricity and flood control. Even his normal work is now more varied than before.

One of the greatest attractions of the I.C.S. was the variety of the work. The Collector never felt bored. He gave interviews, heard criminal and revenue appeals, inspected a hospital or a municipality, went on tour, visited schools, inspected crops, irrigation works, for-

est areas, etc. etc. and did 'shikar' in between. In the old days, the young officer had time to get himself acquainted with the area and the people, and he did all this on horse-back mostly. He toured frequently, had leisurely talks with the villagers and got to know them. Our villagers are shy and do not relax in a hurry. Their reserve breaks down when you sit on an evening round the camp fire and talk to them about their problems, the crops, the money-lender, the landlord, the civil litigation, their family affairs, etc. Then you get to know the real state of affairs. For this you must know the language of the area well. We, in the C.P. & Berar, prided ourselves on our knowledge of the local languages and the consequent extremely friendly relations with the people of our charge. Even British Officers knew Hindi and Urdu well and I recall at least one occasion on which a British Officer cut a joke with his lawyer friends, saying "vakalat kijiye, magar shararat na kijiye." (argue by all means but do not make mischief) For example I knew practically all the people of my district worth knowing and many more, I fear, not worth knowing! But you must remember that the C.P. and Berar was a rural province with towns few and far between. All this is no longer possible. Soon after a young officer joins service, he is given a jeep which effectively prevents him from getting to know his charge well. There is no tent touring, no riding, no time for leisurely talks with the people. He, of course, is not responsible for this state of affairs.

Independence and five-year plans have brought about a revolutionary change in the affairs of the country as was only to be expected. On the positive side, there is an enthusiasm and *joie de vivre* and a thirst for development and progress, which is all to the good. No longer need 'the tallest of us bend to accommodate the foreigner', as the late Mr. Gokhale once said. There is a feeling of self-respect even among the lowest of the low. Great things are being done and great progress has been made on almost all fronts—more has been achieved in fact during the last 14 years than had been done during the previous two hundred years or more. Industries have been established even beyond the dreams of the most optimistic, education has spread, technical colleges of all descriptions, medical, engineering, etc. have been established by the dozen, public health is being looked after, existing hospitals have

been enlarged and new ones have been established. Women are slowly coming into their own, children and the submerged sections of the community are being increasingly well looked after. But we have had to pay a heavy price for all this. Discipline has vanished from the office, from the class room, from the roads and from the home. School boys and college students go on strike on flimsy pretexts. Teachers have been assaulted, examination halls have been abandoned on the ground that the papers were stiff. Vice-Chancellors have been confined to their rooms by angry students. Universities themselves have become the hot-bed of intrigues by professors who jockey for positions. Discipline is no longer there, even on the roads. See, for instance, Bezwada; the entire city is in the middle of the road and the man who can drive along the public thoroughfares should be given the best prize, and if we have the pertinence to sound the horn you get an angry stare as though asking "what are you going to do about it?" Education is in the doldrums; the tempo of administration has slowed down. Thus, when I was in Calcutta, I used to pay a monthly visit to Delhi to chase my cases. Even when I was in Trivandrum I used to pay frequent visits to headquarters to get things done. Except for the top officers and the old guard of superintendents, few attend office in time. A lot of time is wasted in tea drinking and gossiping. Applicants have to wait for days before their petitions are attended to. A general malaise has settled down on the country. Everybody recognises and deplores the fall in general standards but few can suggest remedies readily. Whenever half a dozen intelligent people meet, this is the perennial topic of discussion; some say it is due to the introduction of 100% democracy without any previous training or preparation; others say that it is our doctrinaire and theoretical approach to problems that is at the bottom of our trouble. In any case we have bitten off more than we can chew. There is an undue insistence on rights, but duties are ignored. In addition to a chapter on Fundamental Rights we may have done well to insert a chapter on Fundamental Duties in our Constitution. The District Officer is specially affected by all this. He and his colleagues are subject to constant political pressure from all sides and not unoften find it difficult to discharge their duties impartially. The Collector's responsibilities have increased manifold, but his means of discharging them have dwindled. An efficient and

impartial administration is an essential prerequisite of a democratic set-up such as ours and yet how few leaders seem to realise its importance.

The Civil Service, by which I mean the entire body of civil servants, not only the I.C.S. or I.A.S., holds the scales even between contending political parties in the matter of daily administration, and serves the party in power to the best of its ability irrespective of political complexion. The Civil Service has no politics, or should have none although I admit that some of our senior officers have played politics; its primary functions are to administer the country in accordance with the law of the land and help Government to formulate policy and when once that policy has been laid down, execute it efficiently without regard to the individual civil servant's own opinion of the correctness or justice of the policy finally decided upon by Government. The Government for the time being and the administration, *i.e.*, the Civil Service, are one. The administration is Government's administration. The Minister is the head of his department or departments. There has, however, been an unfortunate tendency in India to divorce the Minister from his departments and to treat him as something separate from his departments. This has its origin in British times. Under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of dyarchy, some departments were transferred to the elected representatives of the people, while some were reserved. Then there were rules that certain things could be done by the Ministers and certain others not. It was made the Secretary's duty to point these out and this invidious function often made the Minister think that the Secretary was the villain of the piece, unpatriotic and anti-national. Later on, when under the 1935 Act, practically all departments were made over to Ministers, still there were some in which previous consultation with the Governor was necessary and certain cases in which his individual judgment prevailed. The Secretary's duty was to have all these rules obeyed. So the impression grew that the Secretary, who was in fact as honest and patriotic as anybody else, was somehow a tool of the foreign Government. But the wonder is that this impression that the services are something apart from the Minister, has survived even today when all that has changed. But as I have said before, the Minister is the head of his departments and is personally responsible for its



efficiency and good administration. If it succeeds, he gets the credit for it, and if it fails to deliver the goods, he gets the blame or should. If the department knows that the Minister is strong, will not brook delays, or tolerate too much red tape, wants administration to be carried on impartially and expeditiously, the department falls into line at once. It is a pleasure to work under such a Minister and I have had the privilege to work under several such. If the civil servants know that their political chief would support them in all bona-fide actions, and would like them to assume responsibility and deal with cases expeditiously within the four corners of the law, they will serve him loyally and well.

If in spite of such assured support the civil servants fails the Minister, if the Collector neglects his function or the Secretary ties himself up in red tape, they can be replaced. Instead, what do we find in actual practice in the country today? Officers are frightened that if they do what they think is right, they may not be supported, if his action turns out to be wrong. Their motives may be questioned; their integrity may be assailed; questions asked in Parliament; a judicial enquiry may be held; and so officers play for safety and avoid taking responsibility as long as possible. The file goes from desk to desk, "passing the buck", as the phrase goes; all kinds of consultations with other departments are suggested; a reference to inter-departmental meetings is made; and in the meantime important projects are held up, long awaited reforms are delayed, and the country suffers. What is the remedy? The remedy is the establishment of relations of trust and confidence between the Minister and the senior officers of the department. The Minister should be able to feel that the Secretary and the senior officers of his department are fully acquainted with the broad lines of his policy and the policy of his Government and would carry it out in the spirit in which it was laid down by him always subject to the law of the land and would never knowingly let him down. The Department on its part should be able to see that their Minister desires efficiency and despatch, appreciates honesty and straightforwardness and would support them in all bona fide actions taken in furtherance of the policy of Government. Who will order fire on a riotous mob, if he knows that it will be followed by a judicial enquiry when his conduct in a delicate and highly explosive situation calling for instant decision will be subject

to a cold-blooded scrutiny in a comfortable air-conditioned room by people who have not the faintest conception of the situation, or how it should be tackled? Yet more lives have been lost by refraining from shooting than from firing at the psychological moment the minimum number of rounds. Who will take prompt action when the merest slip will expose his integrity and bona-fides to doubt and suspicion and his head asked for on a charger by interested parties?

While on the point of trust and confidence, I should like to say that it is particularly true of the Collector—District Magistrate. Unlike Secretaries and Secretariat officials, who work in seclusion, the District Officer lives, moves and has his being in the public eye. All his dealings are with the public; he works in open court or office; he tours the country-side. Unless therefore he succeeds in winning the trust and confidence of his public which they are only too willing to give to a good, honest, hard-working, justice-loving and sympathetic officer, he will have lived in vain. If he shows himself alive to the public needs, if he is known to be sternly opposed to petty officialdom and that no delinquent escapes his eagle eye, if he is freely accessible and is known to be eager to set wrong things right and enforce the rule of law without fear or favour, then he will be rewarded in ample measure by the trust and regard, nay, affection of the people and no public servant can desire anything more. That is how good district officers are honoured and remembered for generations for their justice.

I give a small instance taken from my own personal experience in the districts, even though it may sound a bit vain. There is a superstitious belief in some parts of India that if a man has contracted a serious venereal disease, he can get rid of it by infecting little girls. There was a middle class and very respectable family which consisted of husband and wife and two little girls between the ages 3 and 6. They had a cook, a young man who to all appearances was decent enough. He apparently contracted a loathsome disease and, horrible to contemplate, infected both the little girls who used to be left with him when the parents went out. It was not long before the horrified mother discovered what had happened and the frantic parents were at their wits' end as to what to do. You know how reluctant our people are to complain publicly about such delicate and intimate matters;

they would rather undergo any suffering; put up with any misfortune than go to the authorities to complain. At this time, some of their friends advised them "Go to the Bada Sahab (meaning me, the Deputy Commissioner), he will help you and he is the only man who can." One afternoon the poor couple called at my residence and related to me the harrowing occurrence. I told them that I was as sorry as themselves and would try and see what could be done. I had the case investigated and challaned; the accused was convicted and, as the case was cast-iron, was sentenced to a substantial term of imprisonment. During the 25 years or more that have elapsed since this incident occurred, the grateful father has sent me on the Diwali day every year a telegram of greetings and good wishes. I have related this incident to emphasise the need of Collectors establishing friendly relations with the people of their charge. Your public conduct has to convince them of your zeal to do justice and to protect the weak against the strong and the innocent against the evil-doer, however powerful. One of the things which help the Collector to do this is a good knowledge of the local language. Once you are able to speak the language of the people of the area of your charge, well, they take you to their heart. I found this to be so time and again. The Muslims are very pleased if you speak Urdu well, the Marathas and the Bengalis are delighted when they hear the Deputy Commissioner speak good Marathi or Bengali, and it is only natural. For, to learn a language well needs effort, patience and application and no one puts himself out to learn a language unless he likes the people who speak it.

Nowadays there is little time for such things as much of the time of officers both at the Centre and in the States is taken up with conferences. The idea of a conference is in itself unexceptionable; it means co-ordination of effort, consulting all the departments involved before taking a decision. But when the idea is ridden to death as it sometimes is, and when these never-ending conferences produce little tangible results, one may well ask oneself: Is all this worth while? As everybody is engaged in conference and as nobody can attend all simultaneously, you find junior officers deputising for senior officers and they merely tell the meeting that they would consult their officers. This defeats the purpose of the meeting which is to take decisions. In an impersonal administration,

a great deal depends upon the character of officers and in order to enable Government to keep track of the way in which an official has discharged his duties, the device of the confidential report has been invented. Normally, the evaluation of an official's work either for promotion to a superior post or otherwise should depend upon the record of his past work. Once a year his work is evaluated and a confidential report is written by his superior officer summing up briefly his ability, his intelligence, the way in which he has worked during the year under review, how he gets on with his colleagues and the public, his fitness for further advancement and so on and so forth. The rules lay down who records the first opinion, through what authorities it passes and where it is kept. This is the confidential file of the officer. By and large, there used to be a fairly accurate record of each officer in the past, but now things have changed somewhat. Now, I am told few officers attempt to record their frank opinion because it usually leaks out and gives an opportunity to the officer reported upon to agitate in a covert manner against the reporting officer with the help of the political friends. The feeling also persists that in any case promotions are often not made strictly on the basis of past confidential records. I am far from saying that all was perfect in the ancient regime. A great deal depended on the reporting officer. I remember the case of a young and intemperate Deputy Commissioner who wrote in the confidential report of a young I.P. officer, an Assistant Superintendent, that he was fit to be Inspector-General of Police. The Commissioner, a seasoned administrator, somehow allowed this to pass. But the Governor, the wise Sir Montague Butler, wrote: "Tell the Commissioner to teach the Deputy Commissioner how to write confidential reports".

It is no exaggeration to say that our leaders have no great use for administration or administrators. Comparisons are instituted between administrators and technical men like engineers, doctors, specialists and others to the detriment of the former, little realising that they are part of the same machinery and all perform their respective functions to achieve the common goal. They hardly realise that good administration is nine-tenths of democracy. The more democratic a state is, the greater the need for a strong and impartial administration. Mere platform lectures and platitudes unbacked by action

produce no results. It is generally admitted that administration has deteriorated very considerably of late and if it has not deteriorated further, it is no less due to the momentum it had received from pre-independence days. The Collector/Deputy Commissioner is the kingpin of this administration and many of them feel frustrated because they are unable to perform their functions satisfactorily either to themselves or to the public for no fault of theirs. Why this is so, is a matter for investigation, and a high power committee of experts may be the best means of ascertaining the facts before remedies can be applied. Such a committee seems urgently called for.

The Panchayat Raj has as yet made no great difference to the position of the Collector for, in the first place, it has recently been introduced only in two states, viz., Rajasthan and Andhra, and it is in any case too early to gauge its impact on the position of the Collector. One view I have heard, however, and that is that corruption has become rife. But I do not forget that our people are inclined to exaggerate. I have no personal knowledge of the working of the system in either province and I do not therefore feel called upon to comment on the possible effect of this new system of administration on the position of the Collector.

The All India services, besides providing a frame work for efficient administration, have been doing something far more important. They have been engaged in evolving a pattern for an Indian nationhood. Belonging to different provinces, speaking different languages and professing different religions, these officers have come to look upon themselves as Indians first and last. This is real emotional integration of which one hears so much nowadays. They feel at home in whatever part of India their lot is cast and it is therefore in the country's interest to continue these services and expand them, particularly after Independence when fissiparous tendencies have reared their ugly head. Prejudice against superior government servants generally and those of All India services particularly was quite pronounced before independence, and when Independence came, the national leaders were in no mood to let these services survive. But it must be said in fairness to them that in utter disregard of the future interests of India, the British themselves had started doing away with some of these services.

Thus, for instance, the Indian Medical Service, the Educational Service, the Forest Service, the Agriculture Service were abolished, that is provincialised. The British sub-consciously believed that with Provincial Autonomy and a weak Centre there would no longer be any room for all-India services in the India of the future. In this they did untold harm to the country. Our own independent Government have gone a step further. But for Sardar Patel, the I.C.S. would have been abolished. I was present at the conference presided over by the Sardar with consummate ability which saw the birth of the I.A.S. Most of the Chief Ministers present pleaded more or less for the provincialisation of this key service. They insisted that the Provincial Governments should have almost complete control over the service in disciplinary and other matters. Sardar Patel told the Chief Ministers that they were being shortsighted. He pointed out that it was not as though the Congress Party would always rule. Suppose the opposition succeeded to the Government and the administrative service was fully under the control of the Government of the day, then what would be the position of the members of the previous Government? This and other arguments had their effect and an all-India service, the present I.A.S., was agreed to. It was then felt that it was a mauled and attenuated edition of the I.C.S. Even the Sardar did not succeed in making it as All-India as he wanted it to be, because the Chief Ministers felt that they should have the final say on its composition in the province and each province wished to have as far as possible officers belonging to that particular province. It was agreed, however, that the surplus candidates like those of Madras may be sent elsewhere. During recent years, the unwisdom of this decision became apparent and the wheel came full circle when the State Reorganisation Commission not only recommended the revival of a few All-India Services but said that at least half the officers including a certain proportion of High Court Judges serving in a province should be from other States. When, however, in pursuance of this recommendation a modest proposal to revive an All-India service was circulated to the States, there was a storm of protest. I believe mine was the only Government that agreed to the proposal at the time. At the conference, to which I referred a few moments ago, the I.P.S. was practically wholly provincialised and this was very unfortunate.

Personally I am of the opinion that the old All-India Services should be revived, the sooner the better, and at least half the number of the officers posted to a State other than their own. I am also of the opinion that a judicial service should be constituted from which all posts up to and including District Judges should be filled up. A small number of District Judges may be recruited from the bar direct as before. The position of the Collector/Deputy Commissioner has not really changed in essence, certainly not in theory and it is just as well. For the Collector, as head of the district administration and the representative of the Government in the area, will for many years to come continue to occupy as he should the key position in our administrative structure.

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Shri M. P. Pai, Chairman of the Conference, in his address stated that they were all thankful to Shri P. S. Rau for the very valuable and thought-provoking address delivered by him. Shri Pai added that the discussions of the Conference would be initiated by Shri M. Unnithan, First Member of the Board of Revenue. It must be noted, he said, that though there have been some changes during the last ten to twelve years, there has been no real change in the role of the District Officer and that was why this Conference was concerned with "The Changing Role Of The District Officer" and not "The Changed Role Of The District Officer", and it was not unlikely that there would be further changes in the near future. It was his opinion, said the Chief Secretary, that the role of the District Officer was in a process of change, and it was not correct to attribute that process of change to the introduction of Panchayati Raj alone. Perhaps there were other reasons too, and one of which was the fact that the objectives of the Government had very substantially altered since Independence and that the role of the State had changed from one of police or law and order state to a welfare state. The role of the government had consequently changed from one which merely gave to the people the minimum requirements of a civilised society to one which wanted to give the optimum benefits to the citizens. The second reason for the change was the democratic ways of working, which made it necessary for the District Officer to adopt a very different attitude to the way in which he handled his work. Lastly, there was corruption, to which reference

was made and though twenty years ago one could be certain that there was no corruption at a certain level, that position had changed and continues to change, and there was a tendency to 'pass the buck' to which Shri P. S. Rau has referred, and he expressed the hope that as a result of public opinion and increased efficiency in the administration they could look to the time when on the table of every Secretary to the Government and on the table of every Collector one could find a placard, which was supposed to be on the table of the American President, "the buck ends here". They were prone to avoid responsibilities because responsibilities got them into trouble, and that was one of the topics for discussion at the Conference. He expressed the hope that the members would freely participate in the discussions. He also made it clear that no decisions as such would be arrived at the Conference.

Proposing the vote of thanks, Shri M. P. Cariappa, Secretary, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Regional Branch, Andhra Pradesh said: "According to our scheduled programme, Shri K. Brahmananda Reddy, Minister for Finance, was to have inaugurated this Conference. But, unfortunately, as the Finance Minister is away in Delhi, he could not be present here. On behalf of the Regional Branch I thank Shri Brahmananda Reddy for sending his best wishes to the Conference. On behalf of the Regional Branch, I thank Shri P. S. Rau for having very kindly agreed to inaugurate this conference at a very short notice. I thank Shri M. P. Pai, our Chief Secretary, and the Chairman of our Regional Branch for presiding over this Conference. The Regional Branch is still very young and, if I may say so, is just out of its teething troubles. I thank Prof. Menon, Director of the Institute, for giving his helping hand in balancing our budget and gathering strength. Our thanks are also due to him for giving us an opportunity to arrange this important Conference in our State. It will not be out of place if I say that the Regional Branch would not have come into existence but for the patronage and help from the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the blessings of our Governor who inaugurated this Regional Branch and agreed to be its President. On behalf of the Regional Branch I offer our sincere thanks to them. With the Chief Minister as the Vice-President of the Regional Branch and the Chief Secretary as the Chairman, we



hope to get the same patronage and help from the State Government in the future also. Practically all the State Governments have sent their delegates to the Conference. A few non-officials too have kindly agreed to participate in this Conference. On behalf of the Regional Branch I welcome all of them to the Conference.

After the coffee-break, the Conference met under the Chairmanship of Shri M. P. Pai. He suggested that to avoid overlapping the

subject be broken up into the following topics for discussion :

- I. District Officer as Collector and Magistrate.
- II. District Officer under the scheme of Democratic Decentralisation.
- III. District Officer and other officials.
- IV. Residuary functions of the District Officer and his work-load.
- V. District Officer—Recruitment and Training.

## (ii) DISTRICT OFFICER AS COLLECTOR AND MAGISTRATE

Initiating the discussion on the first topic, a delegate said "the most important change in the role of the District Officer is his co-ordinating responsibility. Formerly different departments were working in water-tight compartments but now the Collector is to act as a captain of the team consisting of the district heads of various departments and his role of co-ordinator has come into great prominence". He added, "with the promulgation of Preventive Detention Act, Public Security Act, etc., the powers of the District Magistrate are now much wider than they used to be before. If there is any lapse committed by him in regard to the exercise of these powers, the fault is his". He further added "as a revenue officer there are many things that have to be done by a Collector". With the enactment of new land reforms laws, which are going on at a very fast pace, the field of his activity is becoming very much wider". "Again he has to play a vital role in regard to the relations with non-officials and non-official bodies. If the Collector knows the non-officials well, he can get a lot of support from them", he concluded.

The next participant said "so far as the magisterial work is concerned, the scheme of separation of the judiciary from the executive has been effected and the Collector is now the Additional District Magistrate and is responsible only for the maintenance of law and order. In Madras, while there is a District Magistrate (Judicial) who controls the subordinate magistrates in the actual disposal of cases, the Collector in his capacity as Additional Magistrate is solely responsible for the maintenance of law and order and for the general control of the crime situation in the district. In a State like Madras, law and order does not take much of the time of a Collector except during the upheavals like the Central Government employees strike or Kisan agitation, etc. By and large, the Collector's role is now to keep himself in touch with the public opinion and the crime situation in the district and assist the Superintendent

of Police to tackle the situation". "As regards the revenue work too", the speaker remarked, "the Collector has now been considerably relieved with the appointment of District Revenue Officers. He has been invested with the statutory powers under various revenue enactments. Most of the revenue appeals from the orders of the Sub-Divisional Officers are heard and disposed of by the District Revenue Officer himself. But the Collector has still powers to call for papers and redress any genuine grievances which might have gone unnoticed. This is done in order to give him relief to enable him to concentrate on the development work".

The speaker further added that the Collector in Madras State was very much inside the Panchayati Raj institutions, because he was the Chairman of the District Development Council, which consisted of the Chairmen of Panchayat Unions and also legislators. It was only an advisory body. The various district officers of development departments were also *ex-officio* members of the District Development Council and the Collector both as Chairman of the Council and as the local representative of the Government called for reports, supervised the work of the district officers in implementing the plan schemes, offered his advice and also assisted the district officers very often in getting orders from the headquarters and pushing up schemes. Madras did not yet have a scheme of Joint Collectors.\* There was an officer to assist the Collector in revenue matters. He was called the District Revenue Officer.

Speaking about local self-governing bodies, he said "the new democratic bodies are fully alive to their responsibilities, and in regard to the implementation of the development schemes the non-official representatives are taking keen interest and they also seem to appreciate the fact that the Collector, as the Chairman of the District Development Council, can play an effective role in co-ordinating the work of the development departments and assisting them with supplies and technical services which are

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\* A Joint Collector has since been appointed in Coimbatore.

essential if they are to play their part well". Concluding, the speaker remarked that in Madras, public opinion was in favour of the Collector continuing as the Chairman of the District Development Council and thereby playing an important part in bringing the new Panchayati Raj institutions to play their new role.

Another delegate, speaking next, stated that in Assam they had two types of districts, hill districts, mainly inhabited by tribes and plains districts. Administration in both these types of districts was completely different. In hill districts, because of the primitive nature of the people, the administration was concentrated in the Deputy Commissioner who was the District Judge, the Superintendent of Police, the Executive Engineer, all rolled in one. He also did many other things. Constitutionally, they were known as autonomous hill districts. In each district, there was a District Council and certain subjects like land, forests, minor development functions had been transferred to it. In these functions neither the State Government nor the Deputy Commissioner had any part to play.

Referring to the plains districts, the speaker observed that the main change in the role of the District Officer had been the shift in emphasis. For example, about 20 years back, settlement was made on the basis of actual possession, because there was surplus land. Now, in the wake of the land reforms, not only settlement was not based on actual possession, but the matter had to go up to the State Government which had to check on a district-wise basis that the ceiling imposed by the Act was not exceeded and everybody remained within the ceiling limit. Nowadays, most of the time of the Collector was taken up in the issuing of 'taccavi' loans, running of relief operations, looking into claims and generally looking up to the needs of the people. To assist the Collector there were Additional District Officers. All the normal revenue work was mainly done by these functionaries and except for the overseeing of the functions, the District Collector, so far as revenue was concerned, did very little work.

Another shift in emphasis, he continued, had been the de-personalisation of the office of the District Collectors. Nowadays, he mainly worked through others. Previously, he had a very small office having three extra Assistant Commissioners under him. But now he was assisted by an Additional Commissioner and 15 Assistant Commissioners and the whole

office had expanded at least three-fold. The duties with which the District Officer was burdened had made it very difficult for him to give any time to the tangibles of administration. Just as while the army marched into the battle-field, the General did the control from behind, similarly the District Officer was more or less in the position of a General who never actually saw the battle-field and controlled things from behind.

Speaking about the police role of the Deputy Commissioner, he said "while in the olden days the Deputy Commissioner used to inspect 'thanas' and generally maintained contact with the members of the police force, nowadays this is not done, and the relationship with the Superintendent of Police is all that he has to depend upon". With regard to development matters he maintained "some shift in emphasis is taking place. In Assam too, as in the rest of the country, the District Officer has to play his role for co-ordinating and integrating the functions of different departments".

Another important factor he referred to was that previously the District Officer had powers; now he had only functions. "He has now to work through human relationship rather than through statutory powers. It is true that he is authorised to write the confidential rolls of the district heads of development departments, but that is a function which, I doubt, any good District Officer will ever perform, because it means endless friction between him and the departments concerned, and friction will not contribute to co-ordination or integration. He has to work mainly through intangible ways of human relationship for which power is not so important", he added.

The next function of the District Officer, according to the speaker, was the formation of public opinion. He had to function more or less as a buffer between the subordinate officers and the public. To assist the District Officer, there would be the Superintendent of Police who came from the All-India Service and others from the Provincial Service, and naturally it was very difficult for them to stand up to any local political pressures. The District Officer was the only man who at that time had to stand between them and the public and to see that they were enabled to do their work efficiently and honestly.

Emphasising this point, the speaker stated that in view of the glare of publicity to which every District Officer was exposed, not only had

he to function as he thought would contribute to maximum efficiency, but he had also to do it in a climate of public opinion which was more often than not hostile due to historical circumstances. This had made his job very onerous which meant that one of his most important jobs today was not to do what he thought should be done, but to carry the public with him which again meant that most of his time was spent in trying to create a favourable relationship with the local politicians, some of whom could be very cantankerous at times.

Speaking about his place in planning, the speaker said that with the expansion of activities of Government, it had become extremely necessary at the district level to have co-ordination and integration of the various plans and programmes and to see that there was no overlapping of functions and that the wheels of the government functioned in a smooth manner. This had particularly assumed importance with the ushering in of the Panchayati Raj.

Another important fact, according to him, arose from the fact that no District Officer remained in his post for more than three years. In Assam, out of a cadre of 115 officers, there were only 11 District Officers, and taking the span of an officer's service as 30 years, nobody remained in a district for more than 1/10th of service which meant hardly three years. This implied that within the short span of three years no officer was likely to give much importance to the district, for he knew that this was only a training ground for different and more varied responsibilities later on. He expressed the view that the day might not be far off when they might have to think in terms of having a different service to man the districts.

He pointed to yet another trend noticeable with the establishment of the Panchayati Raj. When the Panchayat institutions started functioning, there would be need to handle funds and there would be need to have audit. He thought that if audit was to be effective, it would have to be placed at the district level and the District Officer would probably be in charge of audit functions.

The last point he referred to was about the question of personnel. "To-day", he averred, "the personnel of the various bodies comes under the District Officer and I think the time may not be far off when the District Officer has to be divested of his functions in this regard,

or some extra staff given to him to see that the functions are done properly". He concluded by emphasising the need to have a Public Service Commission at the district level. "In view of the political and local pressures, and in view of adverse public opinion, the District Officer will not be able to function faithfully unless at least an advisory body at the district level is established to help in making appointments", he ended.

Speaking about the trends which were likely to affect the role of the District Officer, the next participant observed that in the Punjab, unlike Madras and some other States, the separation of the judiciary from the executive had not been brought about in the full sense of the term except in a few districts. In a majority of the districts, he said, the Deputy Commissioner continued to be the District Magistrate and the head of the magistracy. The role of the Deputy Commissioner in the Punjab, he opined, had not changed in this respect. The relationship between the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, he stated, was not clear-cut. While, of course, the Deputy Commissioner had general superintendence and control over the police force, the Superintendent of Police was not by any means his subordinate, and this could in certain circumstances give rise to many ticklish and awkward situations. Unlike Madras or Assam and possibly other States, in the Punjab the law and order problem was always there, though in his own hilly district of Kangra there was little crime and so he had hardly anything to do with the Superintendent of Police. He, however, mentioned that a certain amount of separation had been brought about by the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code according to which appeals against security cases were now heard by the Sessions Judge so that the District Magistrate himself had practically nothing to do with them. He pointed out, however, that unless the Deputy Commissioner frequently visited the Thanas he could never get to know how the police was functioning and as he had little time at his disposal for inspecting the Thanas the District Magistrate (or the Deputy Commissioner) was not really able to perform his functions as the head of the police force effectively or properly.

The Deputy Commissioner, he continued, had been responsible in the last few years for the execution of the community development

programmes through the Panchayats which meant that he had to contact the people for getting that work done, which he had never had to do before. The people in many parts had responded magnificently to his efforts although, of course, the success was by no means unqualified. He proceeded to observe "right at the moment the trend towards giving the Deputy Commissioner the role of the co-ordinating agency in the district seemed to be most prominent. In the Punjab, the Deputy Commissioner is not merely the first among equals in the district but is in some ways a boss and the District Officers of other departments are his subordinates, for he writes the confidential reports of all the district officers of other Departments except the Superintendent of Police. He writes the confidential reports of these officers on their relations with the public, on their reputation for integrity and on the interest taken by them in the development schemes, etc. The departmental superiors, however, also continue to play an important role and there are times when there is considerable confusion whether the Deputy Commissioner or the departmental superior should be approached in certain matters, and often the Deputy Commissioner has to act as a post office in this regard which is not a healthy trend". He was of the view that there must be a clear-cut policy. "If the Deputy Commissioner", he said, "has to be in charge, he should be completely in charge of the district or there should be complete decentralisation. It is not like the old days when there was comparatively little work to do for the Deputy Commissioner; he could then act as the general supervisor. He cannot, however, do that now. If the other departments have to function through him they have to be practically parts of his office." But the speaker hinted at the possibility of a completely reverse tendency taking place and observed "as the technological advance gathers momentum and as the nation moves more and more towards decentralisation, the several functions with which the Deputy Commissioner is at present invested may be taken over by other agencies. With the introduction of the Panchayati Raj, this tendency is in evidence. The development functions of the Deputy Commissioner can, after some time, be taken over by the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads; his law and order functions can be practically entrusted to the Police Department, and after some time he may merely be a specialist, in land problems. Even in the matter of land

revenue problems, I feel it can be argued that the present system of land revenue may be abolished after some time; the rural properties may be subjected to some processes of registration and civil law with some modifications in the case of urban properties, in which case it is even possible that the District Officer may cease to exist". He for one visualised a period when the Zila Parishads and the Panchayat Samitis might, if they were successful, be called upon to shoulder wider responsibilities than those entrusted to them at present. He expressed the hope that no attempts would be made to throttle the efforts of any particular body that was given any particular responsibilities. The speaker was opposed to prescribing too many checks upon these bodies.

Another participant pointed out that there had been no district administration in the strict sense of the term in Rajasthan except in Ajmer, though things were fast improving. He remarked "the District Magistrate or the District Collector in the past had neither the influence, the authority nor the prestige attached to an officer of a similar rank in other States. This was due to the MA-BAAP (or bread-giver) conception of the ruler of the State concerned. Rajasthan consisted of a number of princely States." Continuing, he said "except for the Dewans of the States, every other officer, however exalted, was considered inferior to the clan of the ruler of the principality concerned. The District Officer is a completely new institution in Rajasthan and every effort is being made to build up the position of the District Officer".

The speaker continued that the Government now recognised the role of the District Officer as the representative of the Government and the Government wanted the composite nature of the functions of the District Officer at the district level to be properly understood—more so because the people in the Indian States were used to that sentiment of paternal role or personal contact. By issuing appropriate circulars and directions, the Government had succeeded in carving out a distinct place for the District Officer in the district administration vis-a-vis the other district officers. Citing examples to illustrate his point, the participant said "he is the initiating authority and has to give his remarks about the work of some of the other district officers, including the District Superintendent of Police, in respect of their public reputation, integrity, contribution to development work,



etc. He has to make the people realise that his co-ordination of the activities of the other departments does not mean the subordination of the officers of those departments. As agent of the Government he gets things expedited and thus has a position of primacy. Secondly, the District Officer is the public relations man for the Government in the district, whether it is in relation to the Police or any other particular development that takes place in the district, because when the District Officer comes to attend a Panchayat meeting, people come to him and complain about certain law and order problems."

As regards his role as revenue officer, the speaker, added, "there is no uniformity of laws in Rajasthan and certain measures have been enacted recently and it is the responsibility of the Collector as the revenue officer to see that these land reforms are implemented. There have been however some bad consequences on account of the enforcement of those Acts, more so in Rajasthan. It is particularly laid down that a certain number of revenue cases should be attended to by the Collector and if he does not do so, he will get the remark "inadequate disposal" from the Chairman of the Board of Revenue. The revenue work has been delegated to the Additional Collector, but still a specified number of cases have to be done by the Collector." In addition, "he has to keep himself in touch with Tahsils and sub-divisional officers and make inspections. There is the collection of revenue dues; but it is not so much the collection of land revenues as other dues like the grants-in-aid, and loans given by various departments of the Central and State Governments that are adding new dimension to the collection work so far as the Collector is concerned." As to a change in the responsibility of the Collector in revenue matters on account of revenue collections being entrusted to Panchayats, the speaker said that this work had not yet been entrusted to Panchayats and that they had been thinking of having one Panchayat Samiti in each district which would be given the revenue collection work.

As regards the role of the District Officer as a District Magistrate, the participant said that that was still very important. He had hardly any case work but he was expected to inspect half the number of Thanas in the district and all the Sub-Division offices. No transfer of sub-inspector was made without the previous consul-

tation of the District Magistrate and the confidential roll of the Superintendent of Police was written by the District Magistrate. But the position of the Collector vis-a-vis the Superintendent of Police was of a very personal character and it had to be of great mutual understanding without temperamental frictions.

Discussing the relations of the District Officer with non-official bodies, the speaker said "after democratic decentralisation, the Collector is very intimately in touch with the Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. For this he is given an officer also to look after the office work in respect of these institutions. As regards Panchayats he has powers to annul or cancel the resolutions passed by them. Similarly, in respect of Panchayat Samitis he has the power to veto any resolution which he considers to be against public interest, public morality, peace and law and order. He has to submit annual reports on the Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis to the Government and he is expected to attend the meetings of the Panchayat Samitis as frequently as he can. This is very useful to him because these Samitis and Parishads are almost like sounding boards to enable him to assess the people's feelings and also to give the Government view-point to the people in the field".

The next speaker, participating in the discussion, said that the Panchayati Raj and Zila Parishad Act came into force in U.P. from December 3, 1961. The Prime Minister, who inaugurated the Panchayati Raj, said: "We are attempting a great and auspicious scheme which promises to bring about a revolution in the country-side". He also quoted the Chief Minister as stating that although the Collectors had almost been divested of their statutory powers, still being the representatives of the Government, they were expected to keep a watch and guide the Zila Parishads and the Samitis at the block level. There was an apprehension in the minds of most of the Collectors that they had been divested of legal powers. They were asked to be the 'friend' philosopher and guide' to the Zila Parishad and the Samitis. He asked whether in practice they would be able to do so particularly when there were influential political parties in the Zila Parishad who sometimes came directly in conflict with the Collectors or the official machinery for so many reasons. He referred to the Conference of Ministers at Srinagar in 1957 where for two days Minister

after Minister built up a case for the abolition of the District Collector altogether. Some of the Ministers were very vehement in their speeches, almost using abusive words that the Collectors were rude and discourteous. At that time, the speaker said, the Balwantarai Mehta Committee was also considering this aspect. The Panchayati Raj was a compromise but the trend was obvious.

The speaker further added, "the role of the Collector or Deputy Commissioner has changed considerably since Independence though he has been performing his duties efficiently and satisfactorily. It may be due to the very efficient and incorruptible system of civil service which the British have left". He further stated "with the abolition of zamindari in U.P. a big change has taken place in the functions of the Collector though he still collects the land revenue dues from lakhs of small cultivators instead of from zamindars and that there is a complicated and voluminous accounting system which renders the work still more difficult".

The next member, in the course of his speech, said that in West Bengal the law and order problem had been very serious of late on account of refugee infiltration and other activities and therefore the District Magistrate had been largely preoccupied with the law and order problem. Discussing about non-official bodies, the speaker said that steps had just been taken to establish Panchayats and therefore there was not much experience about the same in West Bengal and similar was the case about the separation of judiciary from the executive, which had not taken place in a very marked way. Continuing he said, "there is only one factor to which I would make a reference and that is that even in development work the District Officer has started functioning only recently. In a conference held in Calcutta of the Collectors and District Magistrates, it was decided that the District Officer should co-ordinate developmental activities carried on by the various departments and when there are some local difficulties, the District Officer is approached, rather informally. The speaker was of the view that the senior officers should also work in the districts and for this purpose the job in the district should be made more attractive so that the senior officers might go to the districts.

Another speaker, in the course of his speech, agreed with the view expressed by previous speakers that the role of the Collector was chang-

ing, but his own view was that it was changing fast and would assume a direction which was a natural corollary of the various forces which were working for the fundamental change in the concept of their political life as well as in the social and economic activities. The Collector, as head of the administration in the district, was also a leader who geared up the whole administration to these new changes and dimensions in order to achieve the political, social and economic ends. It was not correct, said the speaker, that the Collector could keep himself outside the political arena and watch the game without getting himself involved. The more the decentralised local units came into existence the greater would be the burden on the Collector and although he might not actually participate in the game of politics, more onerous duties would be placed on his shoulders. The Collectors should exercise the right of being consulted right from the bottom, i.e., the Village Panchayats up to Zila Parishads. But in the present context of developmental activities, more emphasis of his office would be on the field of social and economic activities which were assuming more prominence. With the increase in the social legislation with which the Collector had some connection, he should try to bring about a change in the social concept of his district, but much of impact would be on the economic field because of the acceptance of the socialistic pattern of society as the national objective. The society was changing from a feudal or semi-feudal to a democratic one; an authoritarian and disintegrating society was being converted into an integrated society with certain political concepts. With the nationalisation of several industries, with increasing emphasis on the agricultural production, with the dimension being widened in the cottage, medium and small scale industries, the Collector would have to assume a greater role not only as a friend, philosopher and guide but the work of various departments which were working under him or in cooperation or co-ordination with him in the district, would assume greater importance. He might be called upon to run a particular factory or administer a project or get himself involved in increasing the agricultural production. His role, the speaker maintained, was bound to undergo a change in the welfare state of today.

The speaker continued, "to day the Collector is over-burdened with several diverse and complex duties. The social structure is itself so



complex and so diverse that it is not possible to visualise in the near future that it would be possible to relieve him of some of his duties, but it is just possible that he may be given a Joint Collector or a Deputy Collector or an Additional Collector and, bit by bit, he may be relieved of some of the administrative tasks which he is doing at the moment. But this leadership will have to be felt in all walks of political, social and economic life of the particular district". "The first significant factor", according to him, "which is increasing his dimension of work is the delegation of more power to him. Two trends are found—one is, as far as the Legislative Assemblies are concerned vis-a-vis the districts and particularly the District Officers, the skeleton bills are introduced and circulated and the rule-making power or law-making power is delegated to various departments and Heads of Departments down to Collector and local bodies. The other trend is increase in his work of judicial and quasi-judicial nature. A review of the new legislation which has been introduced reveals a tendency in almost all the States that more judicial and quasi-judicial functions are being devolved on these administrators".

Continuing, the speaker said, "in some States a situation has reached where it will not be possible for Collectors to take up the tenancy work, consolidation work, and several other judicial and quasi-judicial functions entrusted to them by various enactments. They have therefore appointed Joint Collectors and Additional Collectors entrusting the entire disposal of case work to them. This trend may ultimately come in the way of economic development. Therefore, these two trends have to be geared up and placed in the proper hands—Collector, Deputy Commissioner or the District Magistrate. They may not be completely relieved of the functions because some of them are highly essential not only for the preservation of law and order or for the disposal of the cases on the spot like those relating to the disposal of disputes between two citizens, but they are conveniently allowed to be retained by the independent judiciary. So these significant factors could be conveniently removed from the arena of the different functions of the Collector or Deputy Commissioner or District Magistrate and he should be allowed to have a very free hand in adapting and adjusting himself to the changing climate and ultimately interest himself more in the work of pro-

duction in the district". Referring to the remarks made by some of the speakers about the abolition of this office, he remarked, "those who demand the abolition of the Collector's post are not appreciating the role which he plays in the district, the necessity of an official leader in the district and his very vital, useful and profitable role particularly in the economic field".

Another delegate observed "the functions and the responsibilities of the District Officer have been changing with the changing functions of the Government. In the beginning, emphasis was laid on the three important aspects, that is, land records, collection of land revenue, and law and order—not that other important matters like the rural water supply, public health and irrigation sources were all badly neglected. The importance that was attached to this was not such as one would desire. During the war period, the Civil Service officers (Collectors and Deputy Collectors) had to face tough tasks like civil disobedience movements, air raid precautions and procurement of food-grains. After 1947, there was an important change in land reforms, abolition of inams, etc., and side by side with it the community development projects are undertaken. Consequently, the functions of the District Officer have been changing. When development activities are entrusted to the Collector the acquisition of elementary knowledge about them is absolutely necessary so that he may fit into the functions". "As regards the relations between the Police and the Magistracy", the speaker remarked, "if the Collector is recognised as the head of the district and if some responsibility for the maintenance of law and order is vested in him, everything formally and informally must be done to see that he is equipped with powers to discharge those functions, because maintenance of law and order is an important desideratum for development activities".

Coming to the Panchayats and the Panchayati Raj, the speaker observed, "a new outlook is necessary to take into consideration many of the problems of mobilising public opinion and in making the people fully interested in the development work". In conclusion, he said "the work is so momentous that co-operation of every one is necessary. Whatever the shape of things, the District Officer will have to play his role equipping himself with sufficient knowledge and changing or adjusting himself with them. The public should realise that certain

conventions and well-established principles have got to be followed”.

The next participant said, “The revenue functions of the Collector in Orissa have not changed. They have not suffered a diminution from what his counterpart of the British times was doing”. “As for the law and order and the magisterial work”, he proceeded, “out of the 13 districts in 9, separation of the judiciary from the executive has taken place and in the remaining four districts, the District Magistrate still controls the magistracy. In all the 13 he is solely responsible for the preventive sections of the Criminal Procedure Code and for controlling the police administration. He will control the Superintendent of Police in all the important aspects of the police administration. In the disposal of police force and other technical matters relating to the Police department, the Superintendent of Police has a full hand, and the District Magistrate is not supposed to interfere. He writes his character role and all law and order problems are dealt with by the District Magistrate in close consultation with the Superintendent of Police. In cases of discord between the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, it is of course the hand of the District Magistrate that works”.

Speaking about the scheme of democratic decentralisation, he said, “the Panchayats are in existence for about a decade. The Zila Parishads and the Panchayat Samitis have very recently come into existence and it is yet to be seen how the relationships between the Collectors and the Panchayati Raj institutions, that is, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads, are going to develop. Of course, in regard to the Panchayats, the District Magistrate’s role is a supervisory and regulatory one, and in certain emergencies, he has the powers to interfere with the decisions of the Panchayat Samitis. At the block level also the District Magistrate’s role is supervisory and regulatory. The Panchayat Samitis are now going to be entrusted with the execution of development work. Yet he is certainly answerable to the State Government for seeing that development work is done by the Panchayat Samitis and if any administrative bottle-necks occur, it is up to him to resolve those difficulties. With regard to his relationship with the Zila Parishads, the Collector has been made a member of the Zila Parishad. In Andhra Pradesh, the Collector is the Chairman of the Standing Committee. Now there also his role is to deal

with the official members of the Zila Parishad, who are concerned with the development work, and he is mostly to co-ordinate the activities and to remove the administrative bottle-necks”.

Referring to other difficulties of the District Officer, the speaker remarked, “during the Assembly sessions the Collector is flooded with questions on all sorts of subjects. Even after the Assembly session is over, he does not find any leisure as he has to answer all the questions for so many departments. Besides, as a representative of the Government he has to look to the interests and conveniences of the various V.I.Ps. The second point about the Collector’s role is that the Government does consider him as *primus inter pares*. In the third place, the Collector is not willing to continue as a District Officer and is anxious to get away to the Secretariat where the posts carry special pays, and the lime-light and glare of publicity as district head is not there. For this some political wire-pulling is also done, if necessary. This tendency should not be encouraged. To equate, they may be given some special pay as rent free quarters so that the difficulty can be overcome.”

The next participant, commenting on the remarks of the previous speaker, said that the number of posts in the Secretariat being large and the number of districts being small, it was not possible for the Government to give every officer a chance at a suitable stage in his career to serve in the districts. Actually, the position in his own States was that the people were keen on going to the districts but Government was unable to give them posting.

Intervening in the discussion, the Chairman observed that in Andhra they had tried to curb the tendency of officers trying to stick to the Secretariat by securing some senior time-scale posts which would go to the districts.

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The Conference re-assembled after lunch. Initiating the discussion in the afternoon, the Chairman invited comments on the subject “How exactly has the role of a District Officer changed? What were the factors which have contributed to the change so far, and what are the trends now discernible which are likely to have the most significant effect in the future?”

A senior civilian laid stress on the need for increase of production in agriculture and small scale industries coupled with “the utilisation of

man-power." "If these are to be achieved", he remarked, "it is the people that should achieve them, and not the officers. "Officers", he added, "have a very important role, no doubt, but so long as the people are not involved in this process to the maximum extent possible, I do not think, they will be able to achieve these results." He believed that it was through the proper functioning of the Panchayati Raj institutions at the three levels that people could be really stirred up to activity through their own representatives. Therefore, the development of proper leadership at those levels was very important. The speaker was certainly not prepared to admit that the position or the privileges of the Collectors today were in any way less than those of the British days. Today, the Collector was more respected, he opined, but unfortunately he did not seem to feel so because he was one from amongst the people. As to the functions and duties of the Collector today, he was discharging more functions, he averred. The changing role of the District Collector had to be attributed to the changing times and to the shift of emphasis on the developmental activities. If they wanted the Collector to be the kingpin and also the chief representative of the Government at that level, he had to be closely associated with this work. He could not isolate himself from that work and at the same time ask for privileges, prestige and position which he would otherwise enjoy in any particular administration. Apart from law and order, which was a very important aspect of administration, the next important activity related to development. The speaker was of opinion that these two functions should be combined in the Collector. That is to say, he should be a District Development Officer and a District Magistrate. All other revenue work should be done, as in Andhra, by a Joint Collector or by a District Revenue Officer. He emphatically observed, "today the Collector is more powerful than in the past because very influential non-officials give him full support. Not only in fields like small savings or welfare activity or removal of untouchability or prohibition, but also in rural developmental activity, he can today always count upon a much larger body of people to carry out his wishes." He was sure that the Collector would be respected so long as he had a positive role to play. With regard to the talk about the prevalence of corruption in the Panchayati Raj institutions,

the speaker said that if at all there was corruption there it was much less than what it was in directly administered departments. "This, I am stating with the fullest responsibility", he concluded.

Another delegate observed that in some respects the role of the Collector had become much more important than what it was in the past. The present day Collector had a great amount of responsibility inasmuch as he had to work in social, industrial, economic and various other spheres of administration. The dimensions of his work had grown very much as compared to his functions as the District Officer or the Revenue Collector in the earlier times. While the I.A.S. people in general did not in any way fall short of the highest traditions of the older I.C.S. people, in the changing circumstances and in the context of the great increase in the dimensions of the work, in some cases, they could not come up to the required measure. This was, however, not due to their fault. The present day I.A.S. officer did not have the experience of the older I.C.S. officer who had to put in 15 years as a Sub-Collector before he became a Collector. He also lacked the experience, the age, the wisdom and most important of all the art of management which the older I.C.S. officer had before he became a Collector. He suggested the re-introduction of the very wholesome principle which the Madras State had adopted of periodically sending back senior officers to the districts for the simple reason that district administration was the essential part of the administration of the State and when an officer got out of touch with the district administration he was not as efficient as he would otherwise be. The officer in the district would then go to the Secretariat equipped with the knowledge of the district administration which he had gained, and the senior officer in the Secretariat, who was out of touch with the district administration, would go back to the district. There would, of course, be no question of difference in pay and they would draw their usual pay. Some of the unpleasant situations, where the Collector did not see eye to eye with the Superintendent of Police or other officers like the Superintending Engineer, etc., could be avoided by sending senior officers back to the district.

The next speaker observed that the essential ingredient in the role of the Collector was authoritarianism which was very much in

evidence before and which had from all accounts slowly dwindled. "Whereas the Collector", he said, "had previously been regarded as the voice of the Government at the district level, he is now described as the agent of the Government." "To my mind", he maintained, "there is a fundamental distinction between the two. The agent merely reflects the opinions of the Government to the masses, and the approachability to policy-making levels has, in my opinion, tended to undermine the importance of the Collector's role at the district level". Secondly, the speaker said, the prestige of the Collector was not based on anyone function. It was the totality of the functions which he performed at the district level that gave him the prestige. Undue emphasis should not be placed on any one function. He further pointed out, "the Collector is more and more relegated to the role of a specialist officer—may be a development officer, may be a revenue officer, may be a magistrate—but no longer a general administrator, no longer an integrating whole which is one of the fundamental virtues of the District Officer". Thirdly, he observed, "there are four virtues which are necessary for civil servants, namely, impartiality, integrity, industry and anonymity. I am beginning to wonder whether these are being replaced by virtues such as tact and ability to get on with people. While tact and ability to get along with people are good in themselves, if the other virtues are replaced completely by these, the efficiency and the industry with which the Collector is always associated may tend to suffer. Mere ability to get on with people is a virtue which may not be desirable in itself. The political neutrality, which is also one of the fundamental virtues of civil servants, has become much more important with the Collector being involved in a number of departments, in a number of administrative processes, and neutrality in respect of local politics is nowadays much more difficult to attain than in the olden days."

The next participant said, "it has been accepted on all hands that the role of the Collector has changed, and that it may undergo a further change. For those officers, who are unable to face the new circumstances, it is becoming a difficult role. I, however, hope that in due course the officers will adjust themselves to the changing circumstances." He recalled in this connection the deliberations of the Panchayat Sammelan held at Tirupathi

recently at which a number of non-officials were present, who realised the problems faced by the District Officers in the day-to-day administration. The basic test of an officer, in the words of the Prime Minister, he said, was "whether he would be able to draw out the co-operation of the public"; if the answer was 'no' he would not just be suitable. This, he said, was the crux of the problem. The officer must create confidence and trust in the minds of the public and then there would be little difficulty for him. With regard to Andhra Pradesh, the speaker said, that there were some onerous responsibilities placed on the District Collector. He was the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Zila Parishad over which he had no control. All the members of that body were non-officials and obviously he had to be guided by the majority opinion. The speaker was of opinion that the District Officer should have voting power in the Zila Parishad. If he had to sit simply as a non-voting member, no useful purpose would be served since he would be reduced to a mere figure-head.

Another participant observed that historically the Collector became the representative of Government at the district level because the most important functions at that level then were revenue and magisterial. According to him, the change that had taken place in the last few years was in the direction of a decrease in the importance of his revenue and magisterial functions and a considerable addition to his functions as a representative of Government at that level. As regards the writing of confidential roles by the Collector, the speaker said that when an officer got into the senior scale the confidential roles played very little part in what he was going to become next. The speaker opined that they found very few revenue officers today who were technically competent as revenue officers. The logical corollary of this was that the revenue functions would probably continue to be separate from the Collector. They were going to have the District Revenue Officer or the Joint Collector and the Collector was becoming more and more a District Officer.

The speaker added that the general trend of specialisation seemed to be growing in the magisterial role also and there seemed to be a growing tendency on the part of the Police Department also to consider itself as any of the other departments and not in that special

relation, which it had with the District Magistrate in the olden days. One symptom of this was a growing amount of friction between the Collector and the Superintendent of Police in various cases. The speaker pleading for a broader perspective said that they had perhaps exaggerated the importance and the role of political institutions in the dwindling prestige of the Collector. He personally felt that whether they had political democracy or not, the very trend of the modern society was to replace a general administrator by more and more specialised administrators. The institution of the Collector and the District Magistrate of the British days represented a horizontal organization of administration; that was perhaps inevitable when the means of communications were poor and in a large country they had to have delegated authority at various levels. The tendency, he added, was for the creation of specialised departments on an all-India basis and the moment this was done the function of the officer at various horizontal levels will merely become that of a co-ordinator and a mere co-ordinator can never have the prestige that the Collector had in the past. The trend of the modern society was such as to decrease the importance of this kind of general administrator. "It is said", he said in conclusion, "that the Collector is the 'eyes, ears and hands' of Government. But what we have seen in the last 14 years shows that the Government are developing alternate eyes and ears in the Panchayati Raj institutions and instead of hands the Government have developed upward lines of communication. Now the Government are going to have an alternative agency for the execution of their policy also; it will be increasingly taking away this function from mere official organisations to non-official organisations and in that changed context the role of the Collector will be that of a 'Corrector'."

Another member remarked that after the advent of Independence and the beginning of the Panchayati Raj, the Collector was no longer the ruler of the district; he was the servant of the district now. While in the past it was possible for him to get on with the administration without knowing the people, today it was utterly impossible for him to carry on administration on that basis. If one had done very good collection work or one was satisfactorily carrying out his law and order functions, he was no longer the best administrator unless he

carried on also with the best co-operation of the people. Praising the adaptability displayed by the civil servants, the member observed: "Our administrators, after Independence, adapted themselves well to the changing circumstances and have shown that they are one with the people. Today in the changed role in the welfare state they are still acting as the spearhead of the developmental activity". The speaker, discussing Panchayati Raj and local elections, said, "with the establishment of Panchayati Raj, good many local bodies have come up like the Panchayats, Panchayat Samithis, Zila Parishads, etc., and there is increased activity in elections with the result that we find increasing awareness in the villagers today and unless the Collector keeps in touch with the people he cannot chalk out necessary precautions. It is, therefore, necessary that the Collector continues as District Magistrate". The speaker was of the view that land revenue had come to occupy a subsidiary place and today it did not form the major source of revenue in the State. It could as well be entrusted to the Municipal Administration Department. The speaker, as Director of Local Administration, found that about 60 municipalities were collecting annually round about Rs. 5 crores. When that was so, he did not see why it should not be possible for the Panchayats to make land revenue collection; of course they could have a share out of it. Therefore the land revenue had become less and less important and the changed function of the District Magistrate demanded his attention in respect of elections in the villages. When the Government was indivisible, the speaker said, he did not see why the Collector, who after all represented the Government, should not be made responsible for the entire district administration. He further added "if the Collector is taken out of the picture of the development programme, it is a matter of doubt whether the development programme will be a success because in the Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads, the Collector has a dominant role to play and as head of the district and as the Chairman of the Standing Committees exercising supervision over the Panchayat institutions, he carries weight in the district if he adapts himself to the changing circumstances." The speaker concluded with the plea that the Collector should play a vital role in the development programme of the district.



Another speaker observed that in Jammu and Kashmir there were district officers in charge of districts and wherever there was a Deputy Commissioner, he combined in himself the role of a Collector and District Magistrate and he was a very important officer. So far as Jammu and Kashmir was concerned, the speaker observed, he was the Chief Development Officer holding monthly meetings of all district officers and presiding over them and sending his recommendations to the Government which were generally supported. He was also the Chief Vigilance Officer of the district in the sense that he could report against any district officer that the latter was not performing his duties well or that he did not subscribe to the agreed objectives of the national policy or that a particular officer was not sympathetic in his treatment of individual members of society. He also held court to decide cases relating to new agrarian policy and land reforms, the State having established land-lordism and the land transferred to the actual tiller. The share of the produce from land due to the owner was reduced to one-fourth and the owner was liable to pay the land revenue also. These were some of the revolutionary reforms in regard to land. Then there was legislation to protect the tenants from being ejected by the landlords and it was the duty of the Collector to safeguard the interests of the tenants.

The next speaker said that they should look at the problem of the changing role of the District Officer from a long-range point of view. They should keep in mind what his role would be in the future. For this, he felt, that the experience of the last fifteen years since Independence was certainly a good guide in several respects since during the last fourteen years, they had some extraordinary situations in the country. No doubt, a great change took place in 1947 when Independence came and it was followed by upheavals the like of which few countries had faced, and, if in spite of that, that could carry on the administration, it was due to a good and organised administration and efficient civil service they had. Before Independence, he continued, the role of the District Officer was that of a Justice of the Peace. Now it had changed a great deal and was much more important than it used to be because the Collector at that time was only a collector of taxes. Now, in addition to this, he had to execute the development plans and the economic plans,

besides being responsible for the success of the scheme of democratic decentralisation. Continuing the speaker said that as country progressed and education spread and as economic development took place, gradually the work of the Collector would become decentralised and democratised and the revenue work would be transferred to local councils and the judicial work would be transferred to courts. His work as Justice of the Peace would probably be given to some locally important and influential person.

Summing up the discussion, Shri P. S. Rau said that there was unanimity in respect of one thing, viz., the functions of the Collector and his position had been continuously changing according to the circumstances of the country. The functions of the Collector today were not the same as they were in Elphinstone's time. The speaker agreed with other participants that the Collector's role had changed and had been changing and would change and all subscribed to that innocuous statement. He further felt that there was also unanimity of opinion that the position of the Collector had not yet deteriorated. Towards the end of the Second World War, he continued, various developmental activities had been started and were on the increase ever since, and since Independence they had naturally grown a great deal and the Collector's position vis-a-vis these departments had also changed appreciably. The Collector would continue to be the main-spring of these operations—whether he was President or a senior member of the Zila Parishad, or whether he voted or not.

Concluding, he remarked, "since Independence, and with the establishment of parliamentary government, Collectors have come to be entrusted with more and more onerous duties and they should try to enlist the co-operation and assistance of leaders of the countryside and that will make their position easier. I agree with the view expressed by others that with the onset of democratic decentralisation, the Collectors will have necessarily to seek the cooperation of the leaders in the countryside. It is my opinion, that the Collector does not work for personal aggrandisement or for personal glorification or satisfaction, and we have to make him feel that he has got the assurance of co-operation to discharge his duties with which he has been charged".

### (iii) DISTRICT OFFICER UNDER THE SCHEME OF DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION

Confining his remarks to the role of the District Officer in relation to the scheme of democratic centralisation, a delegate said that in the scheme of democratic decentralisation in Andhra Pradesh, the Collector was neither in nor out, in a sense. He was the Chairman of the Standing Committee. That might lead to some embarrassment because the Standing Committee consisted of non-officials and the Collector had only one vote. So far that had not resulted in much complication or embarrassment partly because both had been reacting to this arrangement with a great deal of spirit of adjustment. There were certain instances where the non-officials did not grudge certain proposals even when they found themselves in disagreement, because they did not want to out-vote the Collector. But the same might not be the case throughout the State and perhaps the less developed a part the more there was the spirit of co-operation and accommodation. In his view, that was not a very satisfactory arrangement. But, he found that there was the other extreme at the block level where the Block Development Officer was merely an executive authority of the block. At the district level also, they had a Joint Collector or an officer to help the Collector as the secretary of the Zila Parishad and a non-official was the chairman of the Zila Parishad. The Collector was the chairman of the Standing Committee. It was, however, inevitable that the Chairman of the Zila Parishad should be the chairman of the Standing Committee under the Panchayati Raj introduced in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan and existing arrangement was only a stop-gap arrangement. The Zila Parishads were bound to have certain executive responsibilities as regards the development programmes and that a non-official was going to be the chairman of that body and also the president of the Standing Committee. The question would naturally arise: should the Collector himself be the secretary or the executive authority of the body or should it be somebody else? The speaker, expressing his personal opinion, said

“there should be another officer of the status of Collector as the executive officer of this agency and the District Collector himself should be outside this body, being more or less representative of the Government at that level and guide its deliberations in the interests of proper functioning of the democratic body.”

Continuing, the speaker commented “when once the Collector is out, his relations with other officers of the district will depend on what his role will be when development programmes are transferred to the bodies like Zilla Parishads and the control over these district officers is transferred to the secretary of the body who is going to be a senior officer. When that happens, the Collector will have no direct relations with the district officers and he will be more or less, as has been said, an adviser or supervisor and not the principal executive of the body.” The speaker continued “there were different views whether the Collector in the role that he is now playing in the Zila Parishad should be more or less as the Speaker of the Assembly and not try to put his weight in favour of one or the other of the solutions or should his relations be such as those existing between the American President and the Congress, in the sense that while the deliberative functions are with these bodies, the executive functions are in his hands.” The speaker observed that the best arrangement would be that the new secretary should be of the status of Collector with full executive responsibility.

When asked by a participant as to what he meant by the “status of a Collector” the speaker explained that by “the status of a Collector”, he meant a senior officer, in order to prevent any embarrassment to that officer exercising control over other district officers. At present, he explained, the secretary of the Zila Parishad was only of the Deputy Collector's cadre. The exact relations could be determined later. He added “when I used the term ‘of the status’ I did not emphasise the status very much vis-à-vis the Collector. What I meant was that he

will have the status to exercise his executive responsibility without interference from the local bodies." He found that there was a tendency at the Samiti level to function as an executive authority where there were people with high political status. Therefore, "it was necessary that the corresponding officer was also of sufficient status to resist this encroachment", he concluded.

Speaking next, a delegate observed, "Madras has evolved its own pattern of Panchayat Raj. We have elected bodies with independent powers and resources at the village level, Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis or Panchayat Unions at the block level. These bodies have got independent resources and powers. But at the district level we have a District Development Council which is purely an advisory body consisting of the Chairmen of Panchayat Union Councils and the legislators and the municipal councillors within the district and with district officers of the development departments being ex-officio members. The Collector is the Chairman of the District Development Council. He presides over the meetings of the District Development Council, guides its deliberations and generally helps in arriving at conclusions. Now at every level the permanent officials have been closely associated with the Panchayat Samiti institutions. At the village level they have made village officers responsible for collection of taxes. We have also made the Karnam (the Village Accountant) the Development Secretary of the Panchayat. Now this has paid rich dividends. The entrustment, particularly of collection of Panchayat taxes, to the village officers has justified itself by good results. We have been able to realise arrears of 7 to 10 years within a period of 3 to 4 months. These arrangements have been found to be good. Without the resources we cannot develop the villages. While they can certainly take the public opinion into consideration to levy taxes, the onerous task of collecting taxes should be done by the officials who do not go through the election process. If the Panchayat has to draw up the village production plans, it should have a man who knows all the statistics of the village and who can draw up fruitful plans. Therefore, we have brought the Karnam into the picture by making him the Development Secretary of the Panchayat, though of course every Panchayat has also a part-time clerk to look

after the administration and maintenance of its accounts, etc." About the block level, he said, "likewise at the block level we have introduced a pattern of local administration drawing a distinction between the deliberative and policy-making functions and the executive functions, making the Chairman and the Panchayat Union responsible for laying down the policy and for levying the taxes. But executive functions are looked after by the Block Development Officer and his staff of Extension Officers. Now during the last one and a half years, the relationship between the Panchayat Union Chairman and the Block Development Officer has come in for criticism. But the Government has taken the view that the relationship cannot be laid down in black and white, and that they must let healthy conventions evolve in the process of working together constructively. In Coimbatore district the relationship between the Panchayat Unions and the Block Development Officers is excellent because they are all rich landlords and they have got their own affairs to look after. They feel that they have an effective part in drawing up programmes for the block and its effective implementation depends upon the permanent official, whom of course if he goes wrong, they can always report upon, and get changed."

Coming next to the district level, the speaker remarked "now at the district level, we have fairly strong District Boards in Madras which date back to a very early date. They have plenty of resources. They have many powerful organisations too. But there was quite a lot of criticism on the working of the District Boards. That was because they felt that at the district level it was difficult to bring about that close understanding. After all, at the Panchayat and the Block levels, the elected representatives of the people have an effective part to play because they are more in touch with public opinion and are fully aware of the public needs and problems. In a large state like Madras, District Boards could not manage responsibilities entrusted to them effectively. The entrustment of the elementary education to Panchayat Union, which is a smaller organisation, is looked after better than was the case with District Boards. Therefore, the Government felt that at the district level it may not be possible for the President to have an organisation with full executive responsibilities. It is much better to have an advisory body consisting



of the Chairmen of the Panchayat Unions and officials so that they could meet together and discuss problems of the district and generally guide the working of the Panchayat Unions. These arrangements have been in force for the last one and a half years, and on the whole have worked well, judged by the results, particularly, in respect of mobilisation of the resources for the fulfilment of the plan. For instance, the State Government have fought shy of increasing the assessment of taxes. But during the first one year all the Panchayat Unions without exception imposed taxes on lands. They have themselves all the powers. They have to levy different surcharges ranging from 25 naye paise to 100 naye paise per rupee of land revenue. Likewise, house taxes have been progressively stepped up because Government have given them big incentive in the shape of matching grants. The Collector controls the tax collecting machinery, and at the same time is also responsible for the developmental programmes. He ensures efficient collection of Panchayat Union taxes through his revenue machinery. All these powers to regulate the land cesses have now been vested in the Panchayats, subject to the condition that they abide by public opinion. They should not create any private charge if the land is to be given to any private individual. Then that responsibility will be of the official and not of the elected body as a compromise between the democratic decentralisation and the previous system of administration."

Speaking about the place of the Collector in the scheme of democratic decentralisation, the speaker maintained, "The arrangements have worked out very satisfactorily because the Collector is at the centre of the development programme. He is able to ensure that the Panchayat Union problems and difficulties are attended to promptly by government officers, and generally non-officials also accept the Collector's leadership because he is able to bring a non-political and non-partisan approach to the problems of development at the district level and is able to present the problems and difficulties of the district to the Government with his authority and seek a solution. The sharing of the responsibility has on the whole produced good results. For instance, we may take up the case of the distribution of fertilisers. Coimbatore is a very agriculturally advanced district. The people are fertiliser-minded and there is acute scarcity of fertilisers and equitable

and fair distribution of fertilisers was a headache for the Collector and his staff. With the consultation of the Development Commissioner, this work was entrusted to the block organisation. But realising the difficulties involved, the Chairmen of Panchayat Unions requested for relief from the responsibility of distribution of fertilisers to avoid public criticism in this respect. At a conference of the Chairmen of the Panchayat Unions, they generally endorsed the present arrangements in force." The speaker opined that in a large country like India it was not possible to have a uniform pattern from Kashmir to Kanyakumari because even the administration conditions differed from State to State.

He further added, "the district administration has to adapt itself to changing needs. The main need is for organising people and harnessing their enthusiasm for developmental purposes. Unless the people's representatives are effectively associated with the drawing up of the programme and its implementation, the plans cannot be implemented successfully. At the same time, what is the part the people can play? If the scheme is to be recast, on what basis should it be implemented? Of course, it is people's representatives who do it. But the executive responsibility is always that of civil servants. As Aristotle said, "the relationship between the people and the administration is one between the diners and the cook." Therefore, it is possible for the Madras State to bring together the elected representatives of the people as well as the expertise possessed by the officials and use it to mutual advantage and for public good. This is the system working in Madras. The Collector, as the inspector of Panchayat Unions and as Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local-Boards is responsible for the supervision and audit of the Panchayats and Panchayat Unions. He receives the budgets of Panchayat Unions and scrutinises and sends them back to the Panchayat Unions with his views and suggestions which are generally received with respect and accepted by the Panchayat Unions. The District Development Council is purely an advisory body and it should not be less effective or ineffective because it brings together the entire Panchayat Unions as well as the legislators and the officials and a dispassionate approach is brought to bear upon the district problems."

The next participant observed that while

assessing the Panchayati Raj, the Rajasthan Government decided to devolve authority to the Panchayat Samiti at the block level and not at the district level. It was felt that at the Panchayat Samiti level there would indeed be all the real leadership available and the Panchayat Samitis were viable units economically as well as administratively, and it was thought that if the power was devolved on the Zila Parishad, probably it might be a repetition of the old District Boards. "As regards the two institutions", the Rajasthan delegate said, "the Panchayats and the Panchayat Samitis, the Collector has a large part of delegated authority as well as statutory authority. In case of both Panchayats and Panchayat Unions, in certain cases, he can even suspend or cancel their resolutions. For the Panchayat Samitis, he is responsible for submitting annual administration reports and for the Panchayats particularly he gives his approval for the appointment of a Secretary. It is very useful for the Collector to be associated particularly with the Panchayat Samitis and the Government have prescribed that he will hold inspections of Panchayat Samitis. Thus, he comes into contact with the people, viz., Sarpanchas and the Pradhans of the Panchayat Samitis, and this is useful for him in assessing the feelings and reactions of the people. But more than that, he himself is in a position to help these bodies in many matters so that the problems of land revenue and also of many other departments and law and order problems are all tackled well. He helps the Panchayat Samitis to perform their development work. He is also in a position to help the Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis in more ways than one. Thirdly, he has the support or allegiance of the other district level officers. So, as regards the Panchayats and the Panchayat Samitis, he is the supervisory and inspecting authority, he also extends his helping hand and does good for both of them."

The speaker further said, "At the Zila Parishad level, the Collector in Rajasthan is a non-voting member. He should not involve himself in any disputed question. But his presence helps the Zila Parishad because sometimes he explains the viewpoint of the Government; sometimes he makes effective representation on behalf of the Zila Parishad to the Government. More than that, it is his presence that enables many of the district level officers to explain their view-points to the Zila Parishad. He

has to report on the development plan of the entire district to the Zila Parishad. Certain items of the Community Development schemes have been delegated to the Panchayat Samitis. But there are many other schemes which have not yet been delegated to these bodies, i.e., irrigation schemes, laying of roads, etc. He gets reports from the district level officers and prepares the district plans for the Zila Parishad. It is found that though the Collector is not a voting member, his voice is heard with great respect and, in many cases of conflict, his views or opinions are accepted because of his disinterested judgment. Therefore, Zila Parishad members have themselves requested in almost all the districts that the Collector should be a member of the two sub-committees or Standing Committees for the purpose of administration of finance and production programmes". In respect of co-ordination, the speaker pointed out, "as for co-ordination, there is no cause for any friction or disharmony. It is better for him to have good relations with the elected heads of those three bodies and this also facilitates better relations between the Pradhans and government servants at the Panchayat Samiti level."

The next participant discussing the relations between the District Officer and democratic institutions in the district, observed "the subject chosen for discussion is the role of the Collector in democratic decentralisation: whether he should be in or out of it. He is both in and out. Since he is the Chairman of the Standing Committee, he is in. As far as the Zila Parishad is concerned, where the non-official Chairman presides, he is out. But that is not the question. The main issue is: how far the Collector is helpful for the successful functioning of Panchayati Raj?" The speaker suggested that a senior officer of the I.A.S. or Joint Collector's cadre should be appointed as Secretary of the Zila Parishad, and the Collector should be kept completely out of this picture because he has got other duties to perform. Proceeding, he remarked, "at present he is not devoting much of his attention as expected of him to development work. He has a lot of cases to hear every day. Especially in Hyderabad city, the Collector has got to perform several other duties such as receiving V.I.Ps. Some speakers have said that the Collector has voting power in the Zilla Parishad in some States and the Rajasthan Collector says he has no voting

power. It is not the question of voting power or no voting power. That situation should not arise at all. Let the Collector be an adviser to the Zilla Parishad because he will be the senior man in the district. He, as Chairman of the Standing Committees, of the Zilla Parishad, holds meetings once in three months. The Collector presides and the Chairman, Zilla Parishad, sits there with no power at all. The Standing Committees are statutory bodies and they have got full powers. In principle, this is wrong. The Chairman of the Zilla Parishad should also be the Chairman of the Standing Committees, because he is intimately connected with the Panchayati Raj scheme, and has studied it well. People say that non-official people are clamouring for power. It is not a question of power at all; it is a question of responsibility."

Dealing with corruption in democratic institutions in the district, the speaker continued "it is becoming much less under Panchayati Raj and there is no scope at all for the people to be corrupt, even though they have that temptation, because of the presence of people's representatives in all these bodies." The speaker concluded by emphasising that the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad should be the Chairman of the Standing Committees.

The delegate from Orissa, speaking about the position in his State, stated that the relationship between the Collector and the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj was that at the lowest level there was Panchayat, at the block level there was Panchayat Samithis and at the district level, there was Zilla Parishad. The Collector exercised general power of inspection, supervision and control over the performance of administrative duties of Gram Panchayats. He was also vested with certain emergency powers, to be exercised in case of neglect and abuse of powers by the Panchayat. With regard to Panchayat Samithi and Zilla Parishad, he said "the Collector has powers of inspection and supervision of officers of Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads and of institutions under their control. He oversees the execution of developmental work under the control of Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads. Besides being a member of Zilla Parishad, not as a voting member but as an ordinary member, the Collector is the Chairman of the Administrative Co-ordination Committee on the Andhra pattern,

consisting of development officers working at the district level. While the functions of the Collector with regard to Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samithis are supervisory in order to ensure the performance of duties by those bodies in accordance with the relevant Acts, his functions in relation to Zilla Parishad are more close and direct inasmuch as, he is a member of the Zilla Parishad, being the supervisory authority thereof. Although Gram Panchayats have been functioning for about a decade, Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads have just started functioning, and it is too early to comment on the working of these bodies."

Discussing the question whether the District Officer should be in or out of the scheme of democratic decentralisation, he stated, "with regard to Village Panchayats, he is out of the Panchayats, but he is still in the scheme of the Panchayats because he is the supervisory and inspecting authority. With regard to Panchayat Samithis, he is also the supervising authority, although he is not a member of the Samithi. But with regard to Zilla Parishad, he is a member of the Parishad though not a voting member. He is also the Chairman of the Administrative Co-ordination Committee of the Parishad. Further, he has supervisory duties with regard to it. He agreed with the previous speaker that in a scheme of democratic decentralisation it was only fair and right that the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad rather than the Collector should be the Chairman of the Standing Committees. That was in accordance with the democratic practice prevalent in England where in the County Councils and the Borough Councils whose administration was run by the committee system, no committee was presided over by an officer. The Town Clerk never presided over any of these committees, but the chairmanship of these committees went by rotation among the members. He disclosed that this point was discussed by his Government, but they were advised that for some time to come the Collector might be the Chairman. As a temporary measure, he said, it was all right, but in principle, what his predecessor had stated was quite unexceptionable. As to the question whether he should function through an Additional Collector or not, the speaker observed, "In my State, an Additional District Collector has been appointed as the Secretary of the Zilla Parishad, so that the Collector can supervise his functions. As to another question whether he

should be a participant or principal executive, the fact is that he is supervisor in all these bodies; he is an adviser; he is a participant. Only in the Zilla Parishad he is just a member and can participate in the deliberations though he cannot vote. My State Government has come to the conclusion that this arrangement may continue for the time being."

Another participant observed that in Madras the Collector was the Chairman of the District Development Council, but a non-official was the Chairman of the Standing Committee, because that was an advisory body. The Standing Committees had to deal with different subjects like agriculture, education, health, etc., and each of the Standing Committees elected from amongst its members a non-official as a chairman.

The next speaker said that in matters like this, when they were serving the public, an objective view should be brought to bear upon the questions. If they were going to have a Secretary who was to work under the chairman of the Zila Parishad and his confidential roll was to be written by the Chairman, he felt it would not be possible for the officer to give that independent advice which the Collector was now doing. While there was little difference between the practices followed in different States in implementing the Panchayati Raj, he suggested that the present pattern might be given a fair trial for a year or more before considering whether any change was really necessary. It might so happen that even with slight modification, the same degree of success could be obtained.

Another delegate observed that the system differed from State to State. According to him, the answer to the question as to whether the Collector should be in or out would depend upon what actually they were aiming at. It depended upon how the State Government wanted the scheme to be carried out. One concept could be that the State Government wanted the developmental functions to be carried out through its agent in the district, viz., the Collector. Another concept could be that the State Government decided to introduce another level of democracy at the district in which case the responsibility for development would lie squarely on the shoulders of the representative body rather than on the shoulders of the Collector. What the speaker was trying to emphasise was that they could not have it both ways. They had to

be clear in their mind whether the representatives of the people should be entrusted with the task of carrying out the developmental functions or the State Governments should have control over the execution of the developmental functions through the Collector. Unless they were clear in their mind about these two aspects, the answer was bound to be different in different cases. He felt that nobody had touched so far on the political aspect of the question. In the morning one of the delegates had said that the Collector should be an official leader of the body. Perhaps he meant that he should be a political leader. He wondered how the Collector could be the leader of the elected body. He assumed perhaps that they were not going to change the basis of the Collector's position. He was bound to be a member of bureaucracy and if he were to become a leader he would involve himself in many difficulties. Another contingency also could arise that while one party was in power at the state level, some other party might be in power at the Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti or the Zila Parishad levels. His reading of the situation was, in his own words, "if we are going towards the path of democratic decentralisation, real power may gravitate towards the Panchayat Samitis. If this is so, I do not see how the Collector can be associated with these highly inflammable bodies, which have seeds of political power in their hands. Therefore, I am not in a position to answer the question either way. I suggest that we must be clear in our mind as to what kind of arrangement we envisage."

Another delegate stated that in Assam democratic decentralisation was practised at the district level in hill districts, and at the block level in the plains. The District Council in the plains districts had no executive functions. It was only an advisory body. Hence the question whether the Collector should be in or out did not arise. The objectives of the Mahakuma Parishads were to co-ordinate the activities of the Anchal Panchayats, in so far as they related to more than one Panchayat, and to have general supervision. Otherwise they were mainly advisory, supervisory and guiding bodies. The functions of the Collector, he added, really came into play so far as the Anchal Panchayats or the Panchayat Samitis were concerned and there the link was maintained because all the officers at the block level were under his control. The B.D.O. was under the control of the Deputy



Commissioner and all the Extension Officers in charge of various developmental activities came under respective development departments.

Referring to the point raised by one of the participants suggesting that the control of the District Officers should be ultimately transferred to Zila Parishads, he maintained, "as far as I know, there will always be two sets of functions performed at district level, one of which will fall within the sphere of Panchayati Raj bodies, and the other within the State sphere, which, for a variety of reasons, the Zila Parishad cannot do. I do not know how the district heads of development departments can be handed over to the Zila Parishad; they have inevitably to remain in the State Government. At the most, there can be dual control, but I cannot understand one set of officers for the Zila Parishad and another for the State Government. I cannot comprehend planning being directly under the Zila Parishad with the State Government having nothing to do with it, unless it is assumed that the State Government will be doing no function at the district level. Secondly, our experience in Assam is that more than one executive body at the district level is not likely to succeed. If we have two executive bodies, they are likely to tread on one another's toes. It was tried in the hill districts when they had a regional council, and the experiment did not succeed. So far as the role of the Collector vis-a-vis Anchal Panchayats is concerned, the District Officer has powers of supervision and control. The most important thing is that he has to see that the grants given to them are spent on the items for which they are given."

The next speaker said that while in some places the Collector was both in and out, in some other places he was either in or out. But in U.P. it was no longer open for an academic discussion because since December 3, 1960, the Collector has been almost completely out. He had no statutory functions except that in an emergency he could issue, just like under the provisions of the Municipalities Act, a directive subject to the Government's approval. The Collector was completely out both at the block level and at the Parishad level. He could, of course, get some works and some documents inspected. He could also address the Parishad but he had hardly any powers of supervision or effective control. The Additional District Magistrate, who was the Chief Executive Officer

of the Parishad, exercised supervision over the B.D.Os. (Block Development Officers) and also over the Panchayats; he could also sit with the Chairman of the Zila Parishad and review its work; he might also submit quarterly progress reports—first it was a monthly progress report but later on it was changed into quarterly progress report—and it was the responsibility of the Collector to obtain that report from the Chief Executive Officer and send it on to the Commissioner, whose duty it was to send an analytical report to Government. Though the Collector had very limited powers in regard to the Zila Parishad, and he was completely out at the moment, yet Government expected that the Collector would so manage with tact that he would have the confidence of the Adhyakshas of the Zila Parishads and also the Pramukhs of the various Kshetra Samitis. He acted as a guide and friend and gave the Panchayat institutions the benefit of his advice.

The next delegate stressed the necessity of the Collector being closely associated with the Zila Parishad. He could not visualise a Collector who was not closely associated with the Zila Parishad and was not able to give any type of comprehensive report to Government. As one, who was closely associated with Panchayati Raj in his own district, he stated that the Collector had great personal stake and his own personal reputation was closely associated with the success of the experiment in his district, and, if in the Panchayati Raj institutions he was asked to act as an observer, he did not think we would have taken so much interest. He was against the suggestion that a Joint Collector should take over the duties of the Collector in regard to Panchayati Raj institutions, since, in his view, a Joint Collector could not effectively carry out the functions and he would not be able to control the technical officers. With regard to the question whether the Collector should be merely a member without a right to vote in the Zila Parishad, he stated that a slight distinction had to be made between the Zila Parishads of other States and those of Andhra Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, as an implementing agency of the development plans of the district, it was not illogical to his mind that the Collector as the Chief Executive officer should also be associated as the Chairman of the Standing Committees of the Zila Parishads. The role which had been given to the Collector with

regard to Zila Parishads in Andhra Pradesh, he said, was a happy compromise. It might not conform to logic or principle, but the experience for the last two years had shown that it was not entirely unsuccessful. He was in favour of watching the experiment before any changes were made.

Another member, offering his views, observed that with regard to the question as to whether the Collector should be in or out of the Panchayat institutions, the point to be decided was whether Government wanted the implementation of the programmes completely by non-official agencies. If the Government felt that any shortfalls in the implementation of the programmes should be explained by the Collector and that, although the Collector was out of these agencies, he should still be the eyes and ears of Government so far as the development programmes were concerned, it would be a difficult proposition. There should be no objection to the development programmes being implemented by non-official agencies, but in that case the Collector could not be asked to explain the shortfalls. If it was proposed, he added, to have a Joint Collector as the Secretary of the Zila Parishad and make the district officers of other departments subordinate to him, then the question would be whether the district officers would be able to play the double role required of them of being subordinate not only to the Secretary of the Zila Parishad but also subordinate to their departmental superiors. All these complications had to be examined. He was also in favour of giving a fair trial to the experiment.

Another speaker intervening said that the Planning Commission had insisted and all the State Governments had agreed that there should be block plans and district plans, that the block plans should be executed by the Panchayat Samitis and the district plans, mostly by Zila Parishads. If this most important function was to be entrusted to these institutions and at the district level an officer of the status of an Additional Collector was to be the Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad and all these plans had to be implemented through him, what should be the position of the District Collector? The District Collector would then be merely a collector of revenue and an officer in charge of law and order. Would he then be able to retain that stature and status to which they attached so much importance today in

their discussions, he asked. Therefore, they had to consider whether the Collector could bring his own prestige and status to bear upon the Zila Parishad so as to be able to exercise better influence over everybody in the district including the district level officers by being relegated to a position where he would confine himself to mere revenue administration which was slowly dwindling.

The speaker following him did not agree with the view that the Government were developing alternate 'eyes and ears' by the process of democratic decentralisation. He said that the Deputy Commissioner in Assam was never entrusted with development functions; he only co-ordinated the activities of the various departments at the district level and even after coming into effect of democratic decentralisation, the Collector would still be co-ordinating the activities of the different departments. The speaker said that no Zila Parishad would grudge the Collector coming to it and saying whatever he had to say.

Another participant said that in Madhya Pradesh the scheme of democratic decentralisation had not yet been implemented. According to him, the Collector should be kept out of the Zila Parishad; he should not be brought into the arena; he should stand aloof so that he could act as a referee. He was also of the opinion that if the Collector was put inside the Zila Parishad, it would have an unwholesome effect on his functions as a District Magistrate and as a revenue officer. If he got involved in the affairs of the Zila Parishad, he would not be able to discharge his responsibility as a District Magistrate and also his other functions. The speaker feared that the suggestions that he might put forth would be opposed by the Zila Parishad and would lead to an unpleasant atmosphere.

The Chairman, summing up the discussion, said that there was no common pattern of democratic decentralisation and so it became difficult to decide what was the best role for the Collector to play. Pattern differed from State to State. Some States had yet to set up these bodies. In Madras they were consultative or advisory. In Andhra and in Rajasthan they were executive bodies which had programmes to implement and policies to settle. The Chairman said that the general view would appear to be that if the bodies were consultative or advisory, it would be of advantage for the Collector to come in some capacity, preferably as the



Chairman. On the other hand, he added, if they were to be executive bodies, if they not only laid down policies and framed plans but also were responsible for the execution of these plans, then much would depend upon whether these bodies would be merely deliberative and leave the execution to somebody else or they would also take execution on to themselves.

Concluding, the Chairman said, "so far as I can see, the general view is that if the bodies are deliberative, if they merely frame policies and plans, then execution should be handed to a senior officer of the I.A.S. and the Collector should stay outside as a friend, philosopher and guide, but should be in a position to intervene if necessary without being a party to the deci-

sions which are taken. On the other hand, if they are to be, as in Andhra Pradesh, bodies which frame policies and settle plans and also execute them, then there arises a little difference of view. One view is that the Collector for various reasons should have the position which he now has. Another view is that it will be logical to make the non-official President responsible not only for the deliberations of the body, not only for the framing of policies and plans but also for carrying them out. But before any firm view can be offered on this, one has to know what exactly is going to be the pattern of democratic decentralisation. For the present, we have to find solution which is best suited to bring the public into all developmental plans."

#### (iv) DISTRICT OFFICER IN RELATION TO OTHER DISTRICT OFFICIALS

The Chairman, taking up the third topic for discussion, said that the question "what should be the relations of the District Officer with other officers at the district level, block level and Panchayat level" was a little difficult to be cast into precise terms because much depended upon what the pattern of democratic decentralisation would be. For purposes of starting the discussion, the Chairman posed three possible alternatives :

- (a) whether the Collector should be the captain of a team of officers exercising executive powers;
- (b) whether he should be a mere co-ordinator without being responsible for the execution of various programmes ; and
- (c) without being either of these, should he merely be the watchdog of the Government, not merely being the 'eyes and ears' but also the voice of the Government; whether in that capacity he should watch the work of all the departments and advise them generally and report to Government and do such things as not only reporting on programmes but also maintaining the record of performance of each officer by way of writing of confidential reports?

The Chairman then threw the subject open for discussion.

The first participant observed, "the Collector in a district in Madhya Pradesh is more or less a captain of the team of district level officers and has powers to write confidential reports of officers including those of the Superintendent of Police. I am personally of the view that if the work of the Collector is to be judged only on the strength of confidential reports, then he is not worth his job. He should, instead, be able to bring his personality to bear upon the functioning of the different departments by hard work and conscientious application to duties." The speaker added: "so far as development

functions are concerned, the Collector has responsibilities for all the development work in his district and not a single letter can be addressed to the B.D.O. direct. As regards the control by the Collector at the block level, he has powers to write the confidential report of the B.D.O. and send the same to the Commissioner. He has powers also to place under suspension the extension officers. At the Panchayat level, there are Panchayat Secretaries who are appointed by the Divisional Panchayat Officer, but the Collector can suspend the Panchayat Secretaries and make transfers. The Collector enjoys a fairly happy position and has adequate control at different levels."

The next participant observed that so far as development functions were concerned, the Collector in the State of Madras was responsible for implementing the development programmes in the district and, along with responsibility, naturally powers were also given to him. A question was raised whether the Collector should be the captain exercising executive powers or whether he should be the co-ordinator at the district level and it was not known exactly what was meant by the two roles of captain and co-ordinator. If by captain was meant that most of the responsibility should be exercised by the Collector and that the district heads like the P. W. D. Engineer should merely act as his assistants, then that would dampen the enthusiasm of other district officers in doing their work. The other district-level officers had their own responsibilities and the Collector should not assume an overbearing attitude so far as the district heads of development departments were concerned. If that was meant by his role as a captain, the speaker said, then he should certainly act as a co-ordinator so that other district level officers felt that there was a man who could guide things and could get things done by the State Heads of Departments and even by the State Government. Then the position would be that whatever the Collector said would be listened to with great respect.

He should, therefore, perform the role of a co-ordinator. However, the other district heads, he suggested, should never get the feeling that the Collector was acting as a vigilance officer and that he would report against them, as such a thing was bound to spoil the entire administration in the district. He should behave as a senior man who, the speaker said, could make his valuable guidance, retrieve the persons in difficulties and get sanctions of State Government whenever necessary.

Continuing, the speaker said, "generally the Collector is the accepted leader of the official community at the district level with powers to write the confidential reports of officials of all development departments with certain exceptions of minor departments. The Collector has powers to review work of departments and such reports are sent to the Government." The speaker further added "the relations of the Collector with departments like the P. W. D. and other development departments are different from his relations with education department or the co-operative department where there is not much co-ordination work. The Collector is made responsible for the implementation of various plans at the district level and gets monthly reports of progress from other district officers. In certain irrigation matters, the Collector has to obtain the final orders of the Government for speedy execution of the projects and so also with regard to community development work. As a captain or a co-ordinator at the district level he is responsible for the progress of different activities." In conclusion, he maintained "on the whole the present arrangements are working fairly and satisfactorily and it is not by overt exercise of his authority that the Collector is able to get his point of view accepted but merely by convention and working together with other district officers in goodwill."

Another participant, speaking next, opined that the changes that had come about in the country as a result of democratisation had not been properly realised and added that the development of the country was the collective responsibility of all and that there was no question of any conflict between heads of the development departments on this question because each department was responsible for the technical work it was doing, within the limits of propriety. The Collector only came in from the co-ordinating angle, for ensuring

the general development pattern. Now, if these two functions were being exercised, on a matter of principle, there should be no conflict between the Deputy Commissioner and the heads of development departments, although there were bound to be clashes of personalities. If the Deputy Commissioner was worth anything and if he followed the formula of mutual respect for the other man's point of view, he would never allow such clashes of personalities, he added.

The speaker further pointed out "there are only two officers of all-India status in the district and, as a matter of fact, all other officers are of a little junior status. The unfortunate fact is that the Deputy Commissioner generally develops a sense of superiority, of being a 'Barajantu'. If this feeling continues, the clashes will be intensified and will lead to excessive departmentalisation." The speaker suggested a solution to end this state of affairs by a system of checks and balances. He contended that if the Deputy Commissioner wrote the confidential roll of the district officers of development departments on the basis of the development functions performed by them, the latter should, in turn, have the competence to write the confidential roll of the Deputy Commissioner with regard to co-ordination.

Another participant said, "if the Deputy Commissioner in a Committee decides that certain roads have to be constructed, he sends his recommendations to the Government for approval, and it is possible that the State Government might approve and send back the orders to the Department in the district. The Deputy Commissioner does not come into the picture at all. This is wrong. The position of the Deputy Commissioner is rather vague and undefined." Speaking on the confidential reports, he remarked, "it may be unnecessary for the Deputy Commissioner to write the confidential files of heads of departments. One of the main points to be mentioned in this connection is that unfair criticisms should not be there. When the jet age comes into being, the writing of the confidential files may not be necessary at all since Government will come to have much quicker method of knowing the quality of work of field officers."

The next speaker observed, "Healthy conventions have been established in this respect in Rajasthan. But they are certainly sustained

by the Government orders and Government authority. However, such problems are solved by mutual appreciation of difficulties and it is always a matter of personal equation. It is still felt that these relations need to be clarified. With the abolition of the post of Divisional Commissioner, the Collector is in the centre of the development programmes, both in respect of democratic decentralisation and also as regards the development work which is being directly executed by the State Government at the district level. That is why it became all the more necessary for the State Government to specify the relations of the Collector with the other district level officers by issuing a revised circular in this respect. The Collector is in the centre of things. As regards the development programme he has to see that the time schedules for the various schemes in the district are adhered to. There is almost proper co-ordination in resolving the difficulties in the implementation of the various schemes in the district. For this purpose, in Rajasthan, they hold a meeting of the district level officers in which difficulties in the way of implementation of development schemes are discussed and resolved. Their impact on and importance to the people are discussed and difficulties resolved."

Commenting on the system of writing confidential reports, the same speaker said, "the Collector writes the character rolls of the Superintendent of Police, Medical Officer, and many other officers. He also offers remarks on the character rolls of many other district level officers. That is not enough to ensure the effective voice of the Collector. But more than that, there are all sorts of development officers these days, and many of them have to come to the Collector in order to get their schemes sanctioned and accepted. They come to the Collector, who is the agent of the Government and has a greater contact with the state headquarters and can get all things done. It is a kind of mutual appreciation of difficulties that accounts for his effective voice in the district."

Discussing the relations between the District Officer and other officers in the district, another speaker said, "so far as Uttar Pradesh is concerned, the Zila Parishad Act is in force from the 3rd December, 1960. In the past, there was a system of pooling of the district staff. Most of the development departments like Agriculture, Panchayats, etc., were all

pooled and placed in the Commissioner's office. The District Pooled Staff was placed under the District Planning Officer. Other heads of local departments like Civil Surgeon, Executive Engineer, Health and Agricultural Officers were also made members of that pooled office or committee known as District Planning Committee with the Collector as its chairman. After the passing of the new Act, some of the development departments like Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Panchayats will be under the Zila Parishad, and the Collector will be the captain of the team. Others like the Canal Department and the P.W.D. will be outside the Zila Parishad, and to co-ordinate their activities, the Collector will still have an important role to play. The question of the Collector being the captain of the development departments after 3rd December, 1960, does not arise in U.P. As a representative of the State Government, however, at the district level, he has still to be a co-ordinator." As regards the writings of the character roll, the speaker maintained "the Collector, being the sole agent or a responsible officer of the State Government, is directly involved with every work going on in the district, and, should, therefore, write something about the work and conduct of other officers mentioning things coming to his notice."

The next participant agreed with the views of an earlier speaker that if the power of the Collector or his capacity or ability to produce results depended upon his power to write confidential files, the whole show could be closed down. Really, he felt, that a great deal depended upon the personality of the Collector. It was immaterial whether he was going to be a captain or a co-ordinator. "What is really essential", he concluded, "is implementation of development schemes. If the Collector fails to mobilise official and public support, he is to be blamed."

Speaking about the writing of confidential files, he added, "previously the Collector was not writing the confidential files of the Executive Engineer, Medical Officer and the Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Department and various other officers. The Superintendent of Police is not subordinate to the Collector in some States while in others the Collector transfers the Sub-Inspectors or Inspectors of Police within the district. In this connection attention is invited to what the Royal Commission on Decentralisation has said:

‘while the District Magistrate should have general control over the police in the maintenance of law and order, he has nothing to do with the internal administration of the Police Department.’ If he is not satisfied with the action taken by the Superintendent of Police, what he should do is to refer the matter to the Inspector-General of Police or the Deputy Inspector-General of Police.” The speaker informed the conference of a proposal with the Government of India to integrate the I.A.S. and I.P.S. cadres. He added that something like that existed in the former Hyderabad State where a Hyderabad Civil Officer was, to begin with as a police officer, later on a Deputy Collector, later on a Collector and so on. That was a very salutary measure, he said, because there would be no room for irritation between the two services. He was particularly unhappy with the practice of the Collector writing the confidential roll of the Superintendent of Police, and other senior officers of the district. While the Collector had a chance of reporting against them, they had no chance. “It could not be that the Collector was always right and they were always wrong,” he concluded.

A senior civilian, intervening at this stage, remarked that when the Collector wrote the confidential reports, he would write only on those matters about which he was perfectly satisfied. Regarding a technical officer, the Collector was not going to say how he should go about his work. He would not refer to his technical skill but only to the contribution he was or was not making to the fulfilment of the targets of the plan. The speaker strongly felt that sufficient latitude should be given to the Collector, specially when the responsibility was placed on his shoulders for executing the plans.

A retired member of the Indian Civil Service with wide administrative experience, summing

up the discussion, stated that two points had been discussed on which they had to come to a general conclusion. Regarding the confidential rolls, he said, the practice had now crystallised that the Deputy Commissioner should write the rolls of the various officers. The confidential rolls of the Superintendent of Police used to be written by the District Magistrate from the time the system came into existence. Referring to the lines quoted by one of the speakers from the Royal Commission Report (1909) the speaker observed that the same point was reproduced in the Government of India Act, 1935, and thus became the law. “The Deputy Commissioner”, he said, “has no concern with the internal working of the police department. If he has any complaint to make about the conduct of a police officer, he has first to make it to the Superintendent of Police and ask him to take action against the concerned officer. If he is dissatisfied, he has to write to the I.G. Police. As regards inspection of police stations, the Deputy Commissioners used to inspect them previously, but now-a-days nobody bothers about it.”

As regards the question whether he should be the captain or coordinator, the speaker observed that the word ‘captain’ meant somebody who had authority, who could order about. This would, he opined, make the position of the Collector impossible. “It will be impossible”, he concluded, “in actual practice for the Collector to enforce orders. For instance, he cannot tell the Executive Engineer to attend to this road or that road. If he is made the captain, it will be quite impossible for the Collector to carry on; his work will suffer and his utility will be impaired. Therefore, he should be given the right to co-ordinate, to advise and guide.” He expressed the view that the Collector should only be the co-ordinator.

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December 17, 1961

## (v) RESIDUARY FUNCTION AND WORK-LOAD OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER

The proceedings on the second day began in the morning with Shri M. P. Pai in the Chair. The Chairman suggested that the Conference should straightaway take up for discussion the topic "The role of the District Officer in so far as his residuary functions are concerned", that is to say, his functions excluding his duties in the development field.

As regards the residuary functions, the Chairman personally felt that two matters raised in the various papers, important as they were, might altogether be excluded from discussion. One working paper referred to the question of separation of the executive from the judiciary. He felt that it was a policy matter, and while they would be in order in discussing it if the Union or the State Governments specifically decided the question one way or the other, he believed that they would be entering into academic fields in discussing whether the separation of the executive from the judiciary had worked well or not and whether the process should be reversed or advanced. The second topic which he thought might also be ruled out related to the relationship of the District Magistrate with the Police. His reasons for suggesting the exclusion of this topic were two-fold. Firstly, the relationships were specifically laid down in the police Act of 1861, and incorporated in various police orders of all the States and various Government orders and so long as that relationship was the one coming out of the law, he saw very little point in discussing it. His second reason was that the point had been gone into very great detail by the Bihar Police Commission (1961) which consisted of officials and non-officials, and which came to the unanimous decision that there was no case for changing the present position.

The Chairman posed the following questions for discussion :

- (a) whether the Collector is overburdened today;

(b) if he is overburdened, what relief can be given to him;

(c) whether adequate relief should be given in the shape of breaking the districts into smaller units, or, alternatively, by giving him a high-powered lieutenant like a District Revenue Officer or an Additional or Joint Collector; and

(d) whether it will be better to transfer quasi-judicial functions to a judicial officer or a whole-time administrative officer discharging a judicial role? "Here again, there are two points of view", the Chairman remarked :

(i) One view was that there are quasi-judicial matters which can only be adequately dealt with by somebody with a revenue background. So far as South Indian States were concerned, the Chairman said, it might be recalled that it was the rule to have a certain number of judges from the I.C.S. in the old High Courts so that people with vast revenue experience might sit on the highest bench of the State.

(ii) Another view was that there was nothing complicated, intricate or technical about these laws so as to make it desirable to have a revenue officer to discharge these quasi-judicial functions.

(iii) The third point would be whether there should be more delegation of powers at the district level and if that was done by means of delegated legislation what was the part which the Collector should play vis-a-vis such delegated powers.

A member, offering his comments regarding the first point dealing with the area of a district,



observed that it had always been a very controversial point as to what should be the test in forming the unit called district. After going through the various reports connected with not only the formation of districts but also the formation of local bodies, he found that two or three crucial tests were usually applied. The first was viability of the area. When he said viability, it did not necessarily mean the balancing of budget of that particular district, but that the expenditure on administration which they incurred in that district must be justified in view of the collections made from that district. Having regard to the present scientific and technological conveniences which were now readily available in order to balance the benefits of a large area as against the benefits of a smaller area, he felt that the unit should not be too large or too small. The speaker said that the unit should be viable from the point of view of income and expenditure and providing direct services to the people residing in the district. He recalled the diversity of opinions which were rife on the eve of the inauguration of Panchayati Raj regarding the Samitis, whether a Taluk should form a unit or a block should form a unit. While Mysore had selected the Taluk as the unit, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh had chosen the block as a unit. Various arguments were advanced in support of the Taluk as the unit with which one might agree or might not agree. He, however, could not persuade himself to agree in support of the Taluk as the unit. The most pertinent question posed in this connection was whether the Block Samiti was going to be a permanent structure round which the entire economy of that area was going to be built. Formerly, the Taluk was taken as the unit round which the different activities of the Government—of course economic activities were few and far between—were centred. Now, whereas for revenue collection and other purposes, Taluk continued to be the unit, block became the unit for developmental activities. He referred to this question because it was intimately connected with the question of determining the viable area for a district. Again there was difference of opinion whether the Village Panchayats should be constituted from the population point of view or from the point of view of the area which the Panchayat would serve, etc. Unless these three connected points were taken into consideration, he said, it was very difficult to lay down hard and fast rules as to what area should constitute a

district. Broadly, he said, one could say that a village of say 1,500 to 3,000 population should have a Village Panchayat, and keeping in view the number of Gram Panchayats, the Block Samitis or Taluks, the district should be formed. In Andhra Pradesh, the speaker observed, there were some districts which were too large and there were others which were too small and some attempt should be made to rationalise the size of the districts, not exactly on geographical basis but taking into consideration the other factors also.

As regards relieving the Collector of some of the tasks assigned to him, the speaker said that there were only two courses to be considered. One was to relieve him of a certain amount of work which legitimately belonged to the legislature or to the independent judiciary, for the imposition of which Government themselves were responsible. Skeleton bills were introduced in the legislature with regard to delegated or subordinate legislation and more judicial powers which legitimately belonged to the judiciary were sliced off and entrusted to the executive. And then there was now a fresh argument for the constitution of administrative tribunals. The speaker did not propose to enter into this controversy because sufficient material and literature had already gathered round this controversy—whether administrative tribunals in the Indian climate would be suitable or not. The Collector today was discharging judicial and quasi-judicial functions. Under the Revenue Board also, as far as the Hyderabad State was concerned, there was Section 74 which allowed the Tahsildars and the Collectors to determine the nature of possession. After a long and continuous experience of that provision, they came to the conclusion that that provision should be dropped from the Revenue Code and it was ultimately dropped. It gave rise to various vexatious and long-drawn litigations affecting the rights of several citizens. Apart from these, several cases were still pending on the revenue side. There were the provisions of Articles 226 and 232 of the Constitution according to which the ultimate decision was to lie either with the High Court or the Supreme Court and practically every case, in which some question of law was involved, was taken before the High Court under the extraordinary jurisdiction conferred on the High Court under Article 226. The result was that several cases were disposed of

ultimately by the High Court, and then as far as the Hyderabad Tenancy Act was concerned, under Section 91 revisionary powers were vested with the High Court. With the liberalisation of those powers many cases used to come on the revision side to the High Court, and the speaker, on the basis of his own experience in the judicial field, could say that quite a few cases were reversed by the High Court either under the extraordinary powers or under the normal powers of revision. But the question was what was the nature of the cases which required an expert administrator or a person with revenue knowledge to decide? The delegate added that if they looked to the variety of cases which were now before the High Court under the Industrial Disputes Act or the Labour Act or the Social Welfare Act or the Company Law and which were very complicated in their nature, there was no reason why the tenancy matters should not go there. He was even prepared to bring out a list of cases which legitimately should go to the administrative tribunals or even to the executive officers because there was more of administration and more of execution of policies in them than decision of the rights which might be admitted as quasi-judicial in nature between two citizens. However, where the question involved the decision of the rights between two citizens not involving any administrative matters at all, the speaker said, it was worth considering as to whether the Tahsildar or the Collector should be burdened on the appellate side or on the original side with such matters as were understood legitimately to belong to the judiciary. If an attempt was made to separate the types of cases and the judiciary was given powers over judicial matters, the Collector would be relieved to a very great extent of the duties which legitimately belonged to others.

The speaker then referred to the two recent reports of the House of Commons in which two points were dealt with. One was whether the tendency of the Subordinate Legislation to give more powers to the executive was good or bad in the interests of people, and, secondly whether the tendency which again was growing in the U.K. regarding conferring of more powers on the administrative tribunals or the executive officers, was valid or not. These two points he said were very carefully considered and the conclusion drawn in both these reports was that this tendency must be arrested and

the independence of the judiciary must be sustained. He, therefore, recommended that an attempt should be made to arrest this tendency. While there might be necessity of having skeleton legislation in certain respects where the legislature did not have full data or where the legislators did not have an idea of the detailed working of the scheme envisaged in a particular Act and while there might be the necessity of delegation of rule-making power, at the same time the tendency which was growing to have skeleton Acts and then leaving the rule-making to the executive must be curbed because it was an unnecessary burden on the Law Department. Also there was considerable delay in the framing of rules. It took considerable time of the Subordinate Legislation Committee to scrutinise them. Of course, there was the argument that the Law Department was there which scrutinised the original drafts, but when the concerned department appeared before the Parliamentary Committee, the experience of the members of that Committee was that the departmental officers were not in a position to justify the existence of certain rules which transcended the limits and powers conferred by the original legislation. If this was done, it would relieve not only the headquarters officers but other officers also of a very great burden. The other tendency, *viz.*, conferring of more powers on the administrative tribunals, should also be reduced, the speaker added.

As regards the appointment of Joint Collectors the speaker felt that a time had come when an overall view of the Collector's functions had to be taken. Of course, he required assistance, but that assistance should be categorised. He said that was a shift from law and order or revenue collection or decision of certain disputed revenue matters to economic questions and questions relating to production, particularly in agricultural field and industrial field. From that point of view, a careful and sober approach should be made in regard to the question of giving assistance to the Collector by way of appointment of Joint Collector or Additional Collector or Deputy Collector so that the Collector's attention could be diverted to the production problems not only in agricultural field but also in industrial field, and so that the purposiveness of the entire working of the Government machinery could constantly be kept in view.

The next speaker said that in Kashmir there were already officers giving assistance to the Collector in the performance of various functions like judicial and quasi-judicial work, revenue work and work on the criminal side. He said that the Collector's duties were multifarious and all sorts of complaints were made before him. He had a large number of residuary powers as well. The speaker felt that the responsibilities of the Collector were such that they could not be transferred to another officer. In that sense the creation of officers to give him relief was not the immediate problem. The speaker, however, agreed that there must be some categorisation of functions. He appreciated the new emphasis on increased production referred to by the previous speaker and said that this should be gone into thoroughly. So far as the agricultural production was concerned the Collector could do a lot but with regard to the question of increasing industrial production, it had to be considered in what manner and to what extent the Collector could be helpful. The speaker said that the Collector could encourage increased production at the level of small-scale industries so far as the blocks and community development organisations were concerned; but it would be only on a small scale. Referring to the administrative system in Kashmir, the speaker said that the Indian pattern was adopted in 1953. Before that, there were two provinces which were now divisions, viz., Jammu province and Kashmir province—each used to be in charge of a Governor. It was, of course, a misnomer to call him Governor; he was the Provincial Officer and the Provincial Magistrate and Collector. There were subordinate officers under him. For purposes of his functions, the province could be considered to be a district.

Another participant observed that with democratic decentralisation in the district, the people would have direct approach to the headquarters through political leaders but even then the District Officer would continue to be very important in the district. With regard to the point whether he should be in or out, the speaker was of the view that the Collector should be in and hundred per cent in so that he could educate the people in democratic ways and that power should carry along with it responsibility and obligation.

The next speaker, in the course of his speech, said that when it was suggested to give relief

to the District officer inasmuch as his work was very heavy, it might be necessary to break up the district and that depended upon the population of a district and the means of communication it had. These conditions he said, would differ from State to State. In Rajasthan, he said, there were certain difficulties like means of communication which made contacts difficult and the multiplicity of work necessitated that the Collector should be provided with a strong lieutenant or assistant to share the responsibility. Then there was the question of relief being provided to the Collector by taking away his quasi-judicial functions. The idea was not so much to provide him relief in his work but that there was a feeling that as the District Officer always worked for the good of the people, he might not be able to do the work with that impartiality of mind and detachment. He also suggested that the district officers should be given some training in judicial functions in order to give them a particular discipline in intellectual work which would help them to discharge their duties well.

Discussing subordinate legislation and quasi-judicial functions the same speaker said, "this is hardly of any relevance to the District Officer. The problem lies elsewhere. All the departments of the secretariat and even the Heads of Departments ask the Collector for all sorts of statistics and sometimes there is a plethora of reports on these things. Probably the District Officer will be having telephone calls from the Secretariat and the district level officers. This needs to be reduced."

Another participant remarked "if the socialistic pattern of society is to be established at least in the next 20 years, the State's control over the means of production or its ownership will have to assume greater proportions. Consequently, the work of the District Officer, i.e., the Collector may further increase. So, when thinking of giving him relief, it is better to keep in view what is likely to come in the next 20 to 25 years. It is said that the revenue functions should be taken away from the Collector and a revenue officer be appointed to assist him, or that development functions may be given to an Additional Collector or a Joint Collector and the Collector may be given relief in that way. If any of these things are done, there is every likelihood of the Collector being relieved to a very large extent of the present responsibilities, and he can devote himself mostly to his

revenue or important law and order situations or to the developmental work or one of the two. Therefore, in all these States, wherever this relief has been provided, there is no further need to think of appointing any additional officers or giving relief to the Collectors. Further relief may mean impairing his status and position also.

As to the size of the district, the speaker said "there is so much of disparity in the size and the population of the districts. Even in Andhra Pradesh, there are districts which have an area of 11,000 sq. miles with a population of 3 million. There are also districts which are very small with an area of 3000 sq. miles having a population of about 1 million. Therefore, in view of the various considerations already set forth, there is every justification for a re-division of the States into convenient district units. But from what is already known, is it real practical politics to suggest the delimitation of the States into new district units? If it is left to the State Governments, they may still take it up, but there will be an endless number of Committees going into these things and no decision will be reached during the next 15 to 20 years. In fact, even the Taluk boundaries will have to be changed. There are Taluks in Andhra Pradesh with population of 4 lakhs and 90 thousands and again some Taluks with an area of 1250 sq. miles while some others having only 100 sq. miles. With all these differences no political party will be able to decide these things, because of the difficulties especially in the fixation of district headquarters. In Andhra Pradesh a big district like Vizag was split up into two, viz., Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam, the problem of fixation of headquarters of the new districts could not be solved for seven long years. And similarly when the University of Andhra was established, its headquarters was not decided for ten long years. It would not be possible for any State Government with a political party in power to decide about the delimitation of the State into new districts and also the fixation of headquarters. Therefore, it is to be suggested that the Home Ministry may ask the Chief Ministers to agree to the appointment of a high power commission so that it may have the mandate to tour all the States and consider all the evidence and decide how the State should be delimited into districts. If this suggestion is accepted, there is a chance of certain uniformity of con-

ventions and all that coming in the delimitation of the districts. Otherwise, this will continue to be discussed indefinitely and so long as political parties are in power, there would be no solution. In fact, the Madras Government's proposal to appoint two different officers to work with different headquarters was given up because even such a strong ministry with a capable Chief Minister was not able to decide on the fixation of headquarters. So they said, let them work in the same office. Therefore, it is necessary to be realistic, and if it is agreed a recommendation may be made to the Government of India to think in terms of appointment of a high-power commission."

Proceeding, the speaker said, "the second point is that the Parliament has accepted the view that the block should form not only a unit of planning but also of administration. The sooner the Taluks are forgotten, the better. The size of the block is also accepted throughout the country as 150 to 200 sq. miles in area and 66 to 75 thousand in population. Therefore it is better to have a common pattern throughout, wherein the Taluk administration is centred round the blocks so as to be nearer to the people and keep in close contact with them."

Discussing the problems of subordinate legislation the delegate remarked, "about subordinate delegation and all that, the question is whether it is necessary to invest the Collectors with judicial functions either under subordinate legislation or under the main substantial legislation itself. As far as possible, these judicial functions must be entrusted to the judicial officers. The rule-making power should vest with the Government and this may be done under the substantive legislation itself. Otherwise it would, in fact, be extremely difficult to pass a legislation. If certain rule-making powers are there, why should the judicial functions coming under these rules of the substantial legislation be given to the Collectors, when there are more judicial officers and tribunals? There is no need to entrust such functions to the Collectors as such." the speaker concluded.

Another delegate observed, "the entrustment of the quasi-judicial functions of the Collector to the subordinate judicial staff is good in the broad sense of rendering justice. In fact, in the matter of settlement of industrial disputes the mill owners always prefer adjudi-



cation whereas the labour leaders ask for conciliation. In such cases much influence and tact will pay rich dividends. Let us discourage legislation, because in the judicial system, as it is constituted today, men with money could get the proceedings delayed by way of writs." Referring to the points of the previous speaker, he remarked, "the question of bifurcation of districts involves several difficulties such as the fixation of headquarters. They have acquired significance of their own. Government have to think in terms of additional revenue officers as otherwise the Collector's work is unmanageable due to the complexity of work he has to do or the size of the work, and he is not able to be an expert in any particular thing. Therefore, even if the district is bifurcated into a small charge, still the complexity of the charge remains almost the same. The Collector will then have enthusiasm in the progress of the development schemes undertaken by the democratic institutions and if they need his help, he may guide and supervise them. The proper maintenance of the accounts may as well be looked after by another officer of more or less the status of the Collector." As regards the commission for the delimitation of the districts, the speaker said, "the matter can not be settled at the national level and has to be settled at the State level only."

Summing up the discussion on the point, a retired civilian said, "the first question is how to give relief to the Collector having regard to the increase in the volume and complexity of his duties. This is no real problem in the sense that it has already been solved. During the last 30 to 50 years, whenever it was found that the Collector was overworked he was provided with some assistance. The Land Reforms Act and the Tenancy Act contain some provisions which empower the Provincial Governments to appoint Additional Deputy Commissioners. The Criminal Procedure Code empowers to invest any officer with the powers of the First Class Magistrate, Appellate Magistrate, District Magistrate, etc. The question is how to give relief to the head of the district. Is it by means of giving him extra assistance or by bifurcating the district? The districts have been bifurcated in the past, though things were becoming more and more difficult now. It would naturally be so when people have a say in this. If the Government is convinced that the district is to be bifurcated surely it should be done."

As regards the problem of whether the relief should be in the form of transfer of functions, he pointed out, "that is also particularly necessary in order to make it possible for the Deputy Commissioner to function. As an early speaker had said, in the existing laws there is already a provision in the land revenue legislation that a revenue officer is not competent to decide the claims of rights because those rights are decided by civil courts. Such a practice will be neither good for the executive nor for the public at large. Principles should be decided in the Act itself. I understand that the various Panchayat Acts have left everything to the rule-making power of the Government, which is bad in principle. Minor things can be left to the rule-making power of the Government, but not the principles. Such a practice has been held to be invalid and it is ruled that this sort of thing should be incorporated in the body of the Act itself."

Coming to the next point, the speaker said that they were in a fast-moving society and so they must not attempt to legislate for all times to come. It would be good enough for them to visualise the position of the District Officers for ten years hence. It was not desirable for them to visualise the position of the District Officers for the next 100 years, he concluded.

Speaking next, another delegate observed: "the position of the Collector in the district is rather difficult now. Even if the Collector is in or out of the scheme of democratic decentralisation, his work has increased." He recalled the days when in the old Madras State with its 23 districts only two districts had any officer to assist the Collector. They were Vizag which was an important district from several points of view; Srikakulam was also tagged on to that. He was Collector of that district and had a Headquarters Sub-Collector and an Additional District Magistrate, to assist him. The other was Tanjore which was also important from many points of view, particularly because of the heavy work there. In 1938 when he worked in a district which was affected by famine, he was given a Personal Assistant just for four months during the famine days. That meant that there had been some elasticity in the sense that when the work increased due to some peculiar factors they could make out a case and get a P.A. and after the emergency was over he had to look after the

district himself. If he were asked a question whether he would like to carry on the administration by himself or with the assistance of a P.A., in the light of his experience, he would say he would do it only by himself. The P.A. very often was of a lower rank and he had, what he would call, power without responsibility. The responsibility for the work rested on the Collector.

Asked by a delegate about the status of a P.A., the speaker replied that the P.A. was of the rank of a Deputy Collector. Recalling the circumstances leading to the appointment of P.As., he stated that in 1940 when the war was at its peak, Sir Arthur Hope, the then Governor of Madras, thought that the Collector should be relieved of the routine district work and suggested the appointment of personal assistants for every district to assist the Collector. Then, they had got the Andhra and Madras patterns of giving assistance to the Collector by way of appointing a Joint-Collector or District Revenue Officer, almost equal in status. His personal view was that every system of assistance had to be based on the local needs. It was very difficult to evolve a pattern which would be applicable to U.P. as well as Madras and Andhra Pradesh. The speaker was of the opinion that Governments had been vigilant and had been providing assistance wherever it was called for and this had been going on for 40 years. He assumed that the majority view was that the Collector should be in the picture so far as development work was concerned. If the State Government was to decide that assistance should be given, there would be no difficulty at all; whether that assistance should be by giving a Joint Collector or a District Revenue Officer was a matter of detail, and in this regard each State had to evolve its own pattern.

Then the speaker dealt with the question of making districts smaller in size. This was a

point, he said, which would be acclaimed as very desirable by every one. But he agreed with a previous speaker that there were practical difficulties in bifurcating districts and the State Governments would have to evolve practical methods to get over them. There were methods to meet each and every situation. The speaker, however, was of view that the bifurcation of districts might, for the present, be kept in cold storage. In this connection, he referred to the recommendation of the Administrative Reforms Committee constituted in Andhra Pradesh of which he was the Chairman, that the Districts might be smaller. That recommendation, he said, had been accepted by the State Government. They could not wait, however, till the districts were bifurcated and they could, for the present, only think in terms of giving assistance.

He believed that it was agreed by all that the protocol duties and accounts functions should be taken away from the Collectors. It was, however, very difficult to take away certain other functions like quasi-judicial functions. In this connection, he stated that recently the Andhra Pradesh Government had decided that by a particular date all the 'banjar' lands should be assigned and disputes resolved. To resolve this, certain executive measures, after conferring with the Deputy Chief Minister, who was in charge of Revenue, were taken. If the judiciary were brought into the picture in this instance, the whole thing would have dragged on. So, the executive powers of the Collector, the Revenue Divisional Officer and the Tahsildar would have to be preserved, but there were certain things which could very well go to a judicial officer. This, however, was again a matter of detail which had to be worked out, he said. As to the suggestion that a Committee should be appointed for considering the bifurcation of districts, the speaker opined that it was not possible to get these things settled by appointing a special committee.



## (vi) DISTRICT OFFICER : RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

The Chairman pointed out that it was decided at the Conference at Bhubaneswar that, for a long time to come, a certain degree of supervision over the Collector was necessary for the simple reason that the strain on the administrative man-power was so heavy that for the next five or ten years at any rate, it was inevitable that there would be very junior officers working as Collectors. Gone were the time, he said, when Government would refuse to appoint an officer with less than 10 years' service as Collector. The Bhubaneswar seminar concluded that the services of a senior officer to assist and guide the Collector were necessary, in addition to the Board of Revenue which would deal with such subjects as could not be split up on a region-wise basis, e.g. commercial taxes or survey and settlement. For this kind of work it was necessary to have an officer in charge of the whole State. But it was also decided that there should be senior officers holding charge over 4 or 5 districts so as to supervise the work of Collectors, and more than that to be available to them for advice and assistance, particularly when the junior Collector was subject to political pressures. He, however, did not wish to review the discussion now because those decisions were taken at a full seminar on the subject.

As regards recruitment, the Chairman said, there were two problems to be considered. The need for administrative officers had gone up tremendously. In fact, when the State Government (Andhra) made a demand to the Government of India for an additional quota in the I. A. S. Cadre in the last two years as they were short of their cadre strength by about 15, the reply came that in consultation with the Union Public Service Commission, the Government of India were of the view that it would be unwise to go lower in the list of those who had taken the competitive test than what they had been doing. The Government of India themselves had thought of two ways in which this shortage could be filled up. One was by increasing the promotion quota, a proposal which the Andhra Pradesh Government had

favoured because thereby a certain number of seasoned administrators, although they had started in the ranks, could be got in. They would probably be more useful than very junior I.A.S. officers. The other suggestion was that there should be, in the place of the open market recruitment which was previously used to make up these gaps, a limited competition restricted to those already in Government service, the idea being that those who had in the past been taken from open market—generally from commerce and industry—were frequently men who were so advanced in age (40 or 45) that they could not adapt themselves to Government ways of working. The third alternative was open-market or emergency recruitment.

On the question of training, the Chairman observed, the discussion could only be general. The main issues were: was the present institutional training enough; secondly, should there be more in-service training; and, thirdly, was it of any advantage to give the District Officer (the direct recruit) some opportunity to go abroad to broaden his vision and to see what was going on in other countries? Here, again, there were two views. Some people thought that the practice of sending old I.C.S. probationers for a period to the U.K.—a practice which was still followed by the Pakistan service—had definite advantages in bringing back young men with wider vision. The other view was that this sort of trip abroad would be more fruitful if the officer undertook such a study tour or trip not immediately after getting through the competitive examination but after he had some experience of administration, say roundabout his fifth or seventh year of service. These were the topics which, the Chairman said, the Conference should proceed to discuss.

Speaking next, a member observed that open-market recruitment had not achieved its object not because of anything inherently wrong with the men who offered themselves but because others stayed away, so that the alternative was to increase the promotion quota and/or to have a limited competitive examination

among the existing Government servants under a particular age. He was very strongly opposed to further dilution of services. Even the 25% promotion quota, he said, was unconscionably large. The other alternative was a limited competitive examination open to young men in Government service with certain academic qualifications under 30 years of age. But, he said, the real crux of the problem was not so much recruitment as training. They might get a bright youngster but if he did not get training it was no use. So many of the young recruits were not trained for the job properly and this accounted for half the problem of the inefficiency because they were unaccustomed to assuming responsibilities, etc. If they were trained properly by senior officers and administrators who had sufficient training and experience, who understood what was what, then, he thought, the chances were that the administration would be more efficient. Another point was that supervision of the Board of Revenue should be there because unless somebody knew that someone was coming along to inspect, he would not be efficient.

Proceeding, the speaker said that the delays in the administration had increased. Secondly, there was not that type of supervision which they had in the best days of the District Magistrate. Recalling his days of service, he said that in the districts of various provinces, a calendar statement was prescribed to be maintained in which all the particulars of cases attended to were entered. As soon as the District Magistrate, who knew his business simply looked at it, he had a clear picture and if he found anything fishy he got summary enquiries made into the concerned case. What was required was periodical or even day-to-day supervision; this might not be easy, but the calendar statement was a very helpful record. He then stressed the necessity of inspection of the offices. The District Magistrate had no time to do his work, let alone inspect other people's work. In the old days one man inspected the district office and wrote a long thesis. But there was no use merely inspecting, there must also be the follow-up as to the action taken on the remarks made in the previous inspection notes. If they wanted efficiency, they had to prescribe it and enforce it.

At this stage the Chairman explained the practice obtaining in the State of Andhra Pradesh with regard to inspections. The old

Madras practice was to have every Collector's office inspected once in two years by a member of the Board of Revenue. After the formation of the Andhra State also biennial inspections were continued. It was a very detailed inspection in all aspects of the work of the District Collector, report of which went to the Collector and a summary of which went to Government. Government were kept informed of the state of the Collectorate and the Collector himself was supplied, after the inspection, with notes as to defects and shortcomings which he should correct. The action was watched by the Board of Revenue and Government. Similarly, there was inspection of all the confidential records maintained by the Collector to see that no confidential record, which the Collector was expected to maintain, was lost. There were similar inspections at lower levels also—i.e., the Collector inspected the Revenue Divisional Officer's office and the Revenue Divisional Officer inspected the Taluk office.

Speaking next, another delegate dwelt upon the urgency of filling up the gap in the required number of persons in the I.A.S. cadre. Whatever method they followed, he said, it must be settled quickly; otherwise the system might go down. He observed, "I do not see why a combined system of limited promotion by examination and special recruitment can not be tried and why one should be only an alternative to the other. The people who came from outside have contributed valuable experience to our administrative system. While I do not like this to be completely given up, I am against any attempt to increase the quota to complete the cadre by a system of limited examination or promotion. I am also against bringing down the standard of those who have been taken by the all-India examination. But I think it is not impossible to devise a method combining these two—having some people from outside and taking a certain number of people by an examination from below. This would have the advantage of taking people from outside, probably compensating for what was a deficiency in the old I.C.S. system. There were two great merits which in the old days were recognised inside the administration as qualifying for a good civil servant. One was the capacity to put down a riot in the field and the other was his capacity to put up a note in the office. The old system was deficient in the sense that there was lack of sensitivity to

the external environment. This deficiency can be supplied particularly by taking some people from outside. Though we are not familiar with this system because it does not exist in India and many other countries, yet I do not see why we should not have it in India taking a few people at different levels from outside”.

Referring to training, the speaker observed, “it will be useful to modify the present system of initial training after recruitment. The recruits should not be taken to another college, but they should be sent to districts to get some practical experience for a few months; then they may be brought to the college; otherwise it will be merely continuation of the academic training that they undergo in the universities. Practical training also in the present system is not very effective. I therefore suggest that those who are coming from universities may be sent to the districts first and those who come by promotion or by limited examination may be sent to a college or some institution like that at Mussoorie. There should not be merely initial training but also training in subsequent periods, once in 5 or 6 years to give the officers a refresher time.” As regards sending these officers abroad, the speaker disclosed that there was a scheme which the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi was discussing with the Ford Foundation, according to which about 20 District Officers or people at that level, at a particular age, would be sent abroad for a few months on a rapid world tour. This would provide them with the benefit of this experience, he concluded.

The next speaker observed that the officers promoted from the services were of two categories, so far as Andhra Pradesh was concerned. One category was of the probationary Deputy Collector. A Deputy Collector was a directly recruited officer and a certain number of years was prescribed as the minimum after which only his case for promotion was considered by the Special Committee consisting of one of the Members of the Union Public Service Commission or its Chairman, a local officer—the Chief Secretary, and a Member of the Board of Revenue or the Revenue Secretary and so on. The other category was on the basis of selection made out of the officers who had been serving in various capacities in the Revenue Department and some other departments also. The criteria adopted would be the per-

sonal knowledge of any or all the officers, about their work plus the personal record and the remarks left by the officers under whom this officer had served. The results of such selection could not be said to be disappointing because these officers had ripe experience and certain balance of judgment that could not be substituted by high intellectual achievement in the college or elsewhere. That practical commonsense point of view of approaching problems was quite often found wanting in those fresh from colleges or universities.

The speaker suggested that as a compromise the States could recruit directly to the category of Deputy Collectors, and that competition was always the best method of selecting the officers. As in the case of certain I.C.S. men, they were given some training in England and were under probation for one year, i.e. going out as Assistant Collectors. The training that was given to the new I. A. S. recruits was also a useful training and he also agreed that the idea of completing their training with a foreign tour was excellent, because such a tour would provide a good background for his work. He desired that the scheme of IIPA should be implemented soon with the cooperation of the Government of India and State Governments. The speaker said that it was not understandable why a Deputy Collector had to work for eight years before he could be considered for the I.A.S., he might be a first class graduate and had he sat for the examination by competition, he might have been selected. He did not know, he said, why the number should be restricted to 75, in spite of the fact that marks were the criterion for selection. He also referred to the nomination to the I.C.S. in the olden days and gave an instance where an officer working as Deputy Tahsildar was nominated to the I.C.S. before competition was introduced. The speaker also suggested that there should be a combination of the methods which the States followed for recruitment for the Deputy Collectors and the system of all-India recruitment. This, he thought, would, to some extent, meet the shortage.

Another participant submitted that simply because one had started his career in the lower rung, he should not be looked down upon. He suggested that when there were accelerated promotions and facilities for proper training for officials, he did not see why those who started in the ranks should not be given the

same training and facilities. Giving his own example as one coming from the ranks, he said that he had been given exceedingly good training in the practical field, and added that administrators should know the art of getting on with the people as much as they had learnt the art of getting on with the office work.

The Chairman intervened to say that the point here was whether, just as the Union Public Service Commission held that by going beyond the number of 75 we would get inferior quality, would going beyond 25 result in the same inferior quality if we increased the promotion quota over 25. He asked how was this gap going to be filled up. He further enquired: was it going to be filled up by lowering the competition standards or increasing promotion quota?

Replying to these points the previous speaker added that when 25 per cent promotion quota was upto the standard, why should not the proportion be increased. He added that by giving greater proportion to the promotion quota, they would be giving greater encouragement to the staff and that would create an incentive in the subordinate staff.

Another participant suggested that the number of 75 should not be increased in the open competition and even 25 from the promotion quota should be taken at an earlier age. He further stated that great stress should be laid on the training of these personnel. The problem was how the gap was going to be filled up and perhaps they might ask the U.P.S.C. to increase the number progressively.

Speaking next on the same topic, another participant observed "it is true that direct recruitment is not always the best method. To meet the present emergency, it will be worthwhile to increase the in-take from 75 to a little more. This should be determined according to the principle of marks that a candidate secures. After the limit of 75 persons is crossed, the remainder mostly go to the Indian Audit Service in the Government of India wherein they get their promotions earlier. As a compromise between the emergency recruitment by the limited competition, it should be confined to the Government servants upto a particular age; this will give an impetus and incentive to the persons in the State service and others also."

The next participant contended that "Most of the young people found in the uni-

versities have intellectual aptitude and there are people who, though they have not come through the competitive examination, do not lag behind in intellectual excellence. Competitive examination cannot be the only criterion for recruitment to the I.A.S. What is mostly needed in the Collector's role is leadership—leadership in many ways of increasing production. Even in technical matters guidance is sought from the Collectors and Commissioners and this has resulted in increase in production in some States. They have guided Zila Parishads very well. The quality of leadership cannot be attained merely by going through the competitive examination. Let there be competitive examinations, but men for higher posts must be recruited from a wider sphere. American model would suit well. If technical Collectors are needed, technicians also should be brought into the I.A.S. cadre. One drawback in the Indian administration, which experience has revealed, is that there is not enough incentive to the people who by force of circumstances have had a bad start in their lives. This system does not provide for such people to rise. The limited competition will not do if it is limited only to Government servants. It would be debarring a lot of talented men from the universities who are not Government servants."

The Chairman intervened to say, "the only substantial reason for selecting people by competitive examination is that any system of nomination is liable to serious abuse. In that system the best posts will go to the candidates of the V. I. Ps. with sufficient political pull under the camouflage of merit. Sir Sik-ander Hayat Khan once seriously suggested that selection to I.A.S. should not be made by competition but should be made by nomination. It was suggested by him, when he was the Chief Minister of Punjab, that the administrators should be chosen on the basis of parentage just as a race horse is chosen. The system of nomination is followed in recruitment to foreign service in the United Kingdom. Half the number of people for foreign service are taken by competition and the other half by nomination. Universities make the preliminary choice of those whom they think fit. The selected candidates live near their professors and are subjected to a series of tests and are observed at close quarters. By and large, men who come in the competition are better



than those nominated. After having selected men in the U.K., the Civil Service Commission keeps a record of a man's progress for the next five years. Their assessment of personality in the shape of marks given at the interview is not correct."

Another speaker said "immediately after selection the I.A.S. probationers should be sent to districts for field training upto three months. Some sort of training should be given for a period of six months in the Indian Institute of Public Administration. It is much better because there the probationers will come into contact with students taking different degrees—there may be students of economics, politics, history, etc., and it is necessary that they should know something about the ideals of administration. All these things should be taught to them. After the basic training they can know something of what is expected of them. After this course of training at the Indian Institute is over, a further course of six months in the States will do them good." In regard to training abroad, he maintained, "they should also be given some training in countries like the U.K., West Germany and also Japan for a period of six months.

It is necessary that every State Government must be compelled to depute the junior officers at the end of 5 to 7 years' service, according to their aptitudes in various fields, for a course of six months abroad in a prescribed manner and the Ford Foundation can help in securing facilities for the training."

Discussing the system of recruitment, he observed, "The 25% quota basis now be revised from the point of view of the fact that the number of candidates eligible for promotion today is enormous. The cadre of the Deputy Collectors has expanded. Supposing the number of candidates eligible for promotion from among them is large, the deficit can be made good by at least temporarily increasing the quota and taking those who are considered good enough, instead of keeping the posts vacant. The limited competition amongst Government servants must be encouraged and the quota of 25% should be increased to 40% because these administrators are asked to be in charge of all kinds of work for which others today are either not available or the existing rules prevent them from coming in."

The Chairman intervened to clarify. He said, "the figure of 75 persons has been arrived

at after taking every aspect of the matter into consideration. One is that this open competition is also for the purpose of selecting people to other services where there is increasing demand, viz., the Foreign Service, the Police Service, Central Class I Services, and so forth. The other point is that if the 75 limit is increased in the I.A.S., the people entering the other services will be worse still. The requirements of the other services also should be borne in mind and the standards in other services should not be lowered by increasing the number in the I.A.S."

Another participant observed the idea in forming this cadre of I.A.S. was only to make it all-India in nature and to get fifty per cent of the officers from outside the State with a view to arrest parochial tendencies. But actually now, there are only 37% of officers from outside and if the quota of the promotees is further increased, the percentage of outsiders will be even less." The speaker proceeded to say that today they were taking 75 persons for I.A.S. and another 300 for other services, and those who were left out, came to the State Services and became Deputy Collectors and so on. The paradox was that the persons who were not fit enough at that particular time to come within this 400 or 500 people selected in an all-India competition, claimed, 8 years later, by virtue of certain experience, to be better equipped men than everybody else in service. He personally could not see any justification for this. There was a lot of talk as to raising the quota of promotion. But they had to decide whether they were going to get the people through competition or nomination or promotion. It was possible that in competition too the worst men would get in, but nevertheless, it was the best system that had stood the test of time and was free from political pressures. His submission was that even if for filling up the gap it became necessary to promote the people, the promotees should be sent to State other than where they were formerly serving. For example, if an official got promoted in Andhra Pradesh, he should be sent to Assam and *vice versa*. If such a thing could not be arranged, then the service would lose its all-India character.

At this stage a member intervened to remark that originally the system was not to give the appellation of I.C.S. to the promotees. It was only now that I.A.S. was being given as a kind of



appellation. They were called listed-post holders and were not in the all-India Service.

Another speaker next referred to the American model and stated that there was no concept of neutral service there. In America, the speaker said, in the higher levels the Civil Service was political in character; the President nominated those who were wedded to way of thinking of the party in power. But here they were following a system of having a neutral civil service. He ventured to submit that the neutral civil service was not something that could be maintained by having nominations or special recruitments made every five years.

The next participant stated that in the U.S.A. there was greater interchangeability among different professions because there were greater opportunities. Here, on the other hand, once a person got into service, it was not very easy to resign and get into another line.

Another participant doubted whether the discussion was strictly relevant to the main subject which was recruitment to the post of a Collector. What they were talking, according to him, was about recruitment to a service in which there were several other posts, apart from the post of Collectors.

Intervening the Chairman remarked that this was brought in because they could decide what sort of a role the Collector should play only if they knew what sort of a man was available to fill in the post. For example, if they decided not to have the post of Collectors at all and would like the local M.L.As. to be the Collectors, then, perhaps, they should not discuss about recruitment or training.

Summing up the discussion, Shri P. S. Rau observed, "much has been said about the justification for competitive examinations and many views have been expressed. I, however, do not think even the most vigorous champion of competitive examinations will claim that it is a perfect system. Nevertheless, having regard to the failings of human nature, this is about the best and most practical way of recruiting the best available material. As regards the allegation that it is a British institution, I will affirm that it is not a British institution; it is a Chinese institution. About 2,000 years ago, it was practised in China. With all its defects, I do not think, human ingenuity has been able to discover a better method of recruiting youngsters for public service."

Referring to the temporary recruitment of war service candidates, he said that this had to be done by an Act of Parliament and was a very justified measure. Youngsters who would normally have competed for a service and had a fair chance of winning a place in the competitive examination, were "compelled", more or less, because of conscription, to fight for their country. So the grateful country felt, and, very rightly, that those boys, who survived, ought to be given a chance of serving their country in civilian capacity. So, a careful selection was made of these youngsters and several of them had distinguished themselves in civilian capacity.

The speaker next referred to the question of percentage of promotions. Promotion quota for many years had formed part of their administrative structure. In certain provinces like Madras where everybody started as a clerk, there was a competitive examination for provincial services for a couple of years and as they found the same class of persons coming from this service, it was stopped. The result was that everyone started as a clerk, became a Revenue Inspector, Tahsildar, etc., and when he had one foot in the grave, he was due to become a Collector. In other words, they got the promotion too late, whereas, in the provinces where there was direct recruitment at the Deputy Collector's level, one could become a Deputy Commissioner at the age of 45. When I.A.S. came, he said, it was stated that the promotion quota should be at least 25% and all agreed, although many felt that it was probably too much. Nobody would say that it should be less; if it was more it was for high-level desk posts. "By and large," he said, "those who enter the I.A.S. are excellent and they do very well; they know what is what and conduct themselves with tact; they win their purse by actual hard work and devotion to duty."

With regard to the gap to be filled in the cadre strength of the States, the speaker said that after discussing the matter it was agreed by all that the selection should not go below the 75th rank because this had been fixed after studying the matter carefully and not arbitrarily, and those who failed to get in Class I got Class II service. Any further lowering in the rank would only result in diluting the services.

The Chairman, winding up the discussion, observed that each of the items had been

summed up at the end of the discussion of the different items. He, however, wished to correct one remark which had been made with regard to selection by competition. As the previous speaker had pointed out, the selection of civil servants by open competition really started in China 2,000 years back; the Chinese Mandarins used to select people for administrative services through a system of competitive examination. The next country to hold this competitive system was India and not the U.K. When the British Government found that the jobs under the East India Company were filled up by recourse to patronage, they induced the East India Company to hold a competitive examination and the Covenanted Service of the Company was formed which was the pattern for the I.C.S. It was only after the results of this experiment were known that the U.K. copied it.

The Conference, the Chairman said, would not be recording any resolutions. He hoped that the records would give a true account of what had happened at the Conference. The whole intention of a seminar, he observed, was to discuss various points and issues, exchange different views, and arrive at certain general conclusions—may be some of them would be such conclusions which everybody had accepted, may be in other cases there would be a majority view and minority view, and may be there would be a number of points which might be further studied at the Indian Institute of Public Administration.

The Conference came to a close with Prof. V. K. N. Menon, Director of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, proposing a vote of thanks to the Chairman and the participants in the Conference.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

### THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER

IN

### ANDHRA PRADESH

By

S. R. RAMAMURTHI

*Collector*

Philip Wodruff in his book "The Men Who Ruled India—The Guardians" refers to the remarks of Lord Wavell made in the course of an informal speech to the effect that the English would be remembered not by this institution or that, but by the ideal they left behind of what a District Officer should be. Wodruff concludes his book with this observation: "If today the Indian peasant looks to the new District Officer of his own race with the expectation of receiving justice and sympathy; that is our memorial". Anyone conversant with the system of administration in India would immediately be struck by the key role assigned therein to the District Officer by whatever name he may be known, such as, District Collector, District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner. The role is as unique as it is pivotal and definite. This institution of the District Collector—for an institution he has now become—is not the result of a single act of the legislature but is the result of years of hard work, coupled with a sincerity of purpose and a single-minded devotion to duty of a long line of able officers. Slowly but steadily the District Collector has grown in importance, so much so, that today, he is a vital part of the administrative machinery. It is interesting to note that in spite of all changes, historical, political, social and administrative, the basic concept of the duties of the District Collector has remained more or less unchanged although changes have occurred in the nature and volume of work expected of him. It is but inevitable having regard to the fundamental change in the background. We were a dependent country without any democratic form of government and without any national economic objective. But, we are now an independent

nation with a Constitution based on democratic principles and what is more with a definite objective before us. The objective is to build up an economically powerful and prosperous country ensuring a high standard of living to its teeming millions. In short, it is to transform through democratic means and as rapidly as possible a police state into a welfare state based on the socialistic pattern of society. The realisation of this objective has called for a modification of the administrative set-up including obviously that of the role of the District Collector. To appreciate this, it will, I think, be necessary to very briefly touch upon his role during the pre-Independence days.

In the words of Aberigh Mackay as quoted by Wodruff: "To the people of India, the Collector is the Imperial Government. He watches over their welfare... he establishes schools, dispensaries, gaols and courts of justice. He levies the rent of their fields, he fixes the tariff, and he nominates to every appointment, from that of road-sweeper or constable to the great blood-sucking offices round the courts and the Treasury." He goes on to describe how shooting howdahs, elephants and camels are found in his residence giving the impression of the Collector going to or returning from a camp. He speaks of the verandahs being full of "fat men" in clean linen waiting for interviews. "They are bankers, shop-keepers and landholders who have only come to pay their respects with ever so little a petition as a corollary." He refers to the oblations of the would-be visitors consisting of "brass dishes filled with pistachio nuts and candied sugar" which according to him represent in "the profuse East the visiting cards of the meagre West".

Wodruff also gives G. O. Traveleyan's description of a District Collector's day in the sixties of last century which held good till until very recently. "He rises at day break and goes straight from his bed to the saddle. Then he gallops off across fields bright with dew to visit the scene of the late dacoit robbery; or see with his own eyes whether the crops of the Zamindar who is so unpunctual with his assessment have really failed; or to watch with fond parental care the progress of his pet embankment." Trevelyan goes on to describe the District Collector finding time to indulge in a bit of hunting and swimming in the morning followed by a sumptuous breakfast. Subsequently, the Collector returns to his bungalow and settles down to the "hard business of the day"—which consisted of looking into the 'tappals' and disposing of papers. After lunch which was an equally sumptuous affair, he sets off in his buggy to the courts where the afternoon is spent in disposing of cases. Generally, he finds time in the evening to have three or four games at rackets in the new court and by 10 o'clock he is in bed. Dinner may be a bit delayed, but then "in a district nobody worked after dinner."

The description given above is indicative of the leisurely pace of life. It also brings out in a striking manner the concept of the duties of the District Collector and also the priority thereof. He starts with visiting places of crime (pertaining to law and order), then he inspects crops (revenue collection) and finally inspects his pet schemes (analogous to developmental activities of today). In other words, in those static days the District Collector was concerned almost only with revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. Developmental activities, if at all any, were secondary, sporadic and almost negligible, being the result of the individual Collector's fad or hobby and not that of any deliberate planning. This is well brought out by Wodruff when he says: "There was Brown, whose hobbies were tigers and embankments to store water in the rains; Smith who would go miles for a snipe and planted all the roads in every district he was ever in with double avenues of trees and Jones who was building hospitals when he was not pigsticking."

"Why is my district death-rate low?"  
Said Binks of Hezabad.

"Wells, drains, and sewage-outfalls are  
My own peculiar fad."

To sum up, the primary concern of the administration and, therefore, of the District Collector was to keep the "Indian Empire safe for the Crown". This does not mean that no substantial work was done or that nothing much could be expected of this system. On the contrary, the substantial work turned out by some of the District Officers in those days consisting of reports, manuals, memoirs, etc. which are even today heavily relied upon stands testimony to their untiring patience and phenomenal capacity for hard work. They had the training, the leisure and the scope to think and reflect and produce such valuable contributions. What is more important, although intended only to serve the purposes of a police state, the system has been found to be flexible enough. So much so, we have been able to utilise the same fabric of district administration with some changes for an entirely different purpose—that of evolving a welfare state. This shows the inherent strength of the system and its innate flexibility and adaptability.

At this stage, it may not be out of place to briefly dwell upon the question of what is expected of the public servants in general in the changed conditions obtaining in our country. Public service today is literally the service of the public. From being the symbol of the coercive powers of the State the public servant is now looked upon as a functionary in a developing economy, or as an agent charged with the task of executing or assisting in the execution of welfare schemes. The Prime Minister has stated: "public servants must think of themselves as part of the people of India, co-operating in this great adventure of building up India". The planned economy ideal and the socialistic pattern ideal is feasible only when public servants are charged with the right spirit, sympathy, solicitude, insight and understanding. To quote our ex-President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, "Apart from efficiency which is so essential, the administrator needs to have a human approach to all problems and programmes that he has to solve and implement. That implies that he must have a spirit of service. Without this human approach and this spirit of service even the best trained administrator will fail to have the right approach to the problems he is called upon to tackle..."

They must conduct themselves in a manner which inspires people's confidence and co-operation."

It will thus be seen that the attainment of Independence, the adoption of a democratic constitution and the evolving of a welfare state have all brought about a change in the concept of administration and what the administrator stands for. This is true of officers at all levels, particularly at the focal level of execution, viz., the district where we see the institution of the Collector transformed from being a symbol of "Imperial authority" to a symbol of "Public Service".

We may now proceed to examine how far the role of the District Collector has changed. This can be done by analysing his various duties and the manner in which they are discharged. I do not propose to scrutinise each and every item of work that he is called upon to perform. A detailed description of the manifold nature of his work and the innumerable items thereof, interesting though they are, is not relevant for our purpose here. For the sake of convenience, I would classify them into three broad groups, namely, (a) revenue collection and law and order, (b) development activities, and (c) general administration, and deal with each group indicating the changing role of the District Collector in respect of each item. The first one, in spite of the tendency of late to relegate it to the background, is nevertheless as important as ever. The source of all spending is collection. Unless there is income, there can be no expenditure. In spite of the fact that Government have at their disposal more attractive sources of income, land revenue continues to be an important source of income. Again apart from other things, it was due to the fact that he was the head of the Revenue Department in the district that the Collector grew in stature. He became the head of the district from being the head of the revenue administration. The reason for this is not far to seek. The Collector had under him a network of really effective and influential officers at all levels of administration in the district down to the village. As a matter of fact, it is his hold on the village officers which gives him so much authority and it is his close contact with them that has brought him and the people so close. Moreover, the availability of this well-knit system of administration from the village level upwards resulted in Government coming

to regard the Collector as its natural agent who could be entrusted with all new activities. In this connection, it may perhaps be of interest to take note of this phenomenon. To start with, there was the Collector as the head of revenue administration. Magistracy and police were tagged on to him. Similarly, many other departments were also attached to him one by one so much so he was at one time all departments rolled into one. But, gradually one by one these departments were separated from him. This process of attaching and detaching departmental activities to and from the Collector still continues and is likely to continue having regard to the nature of his unique position. One significant thing, however, is that generally the separation is neither total nor complete. A link, however weak it may be, is left uncut. One is almost tempted to compare the Collector to a huge banyan tree on whose sheltering foliage various birds build their nests and lay eggs. When eggs are hatched and birds begin to fly on their own wings they leave the tree which afforded them protection. But, instead of flying for ever and far away, they continue to stay within the sphere of its influence. There has been hardly any change in this role of the Collector as a stepping stone for a new branch of Governmental activity. Similar is the case with his role as a tax collector at any rate until now. But if the present trend of thinking in regard to panchayats being entrusted with the task of land revenue collection is taken into consideration, one cannot be sure that the present condition would continue in future also. No doubt, tax collection is not considered an exciting work as there is little of glamour and more of unpleasantness about it. But, one should not forget that, as already seen, the foundation of the Collector's authority has been laid on this prosaic duty.

Coming now to his duties connected with the maintenance of law and order, the significant point is that though of utmost importance when collections are to be made or in other similar circumstances, normally from the day-to-day administrative point of view this work has lost much of its urgency. It is rarely necessary for a Collector now to jump out of his bed straight on to the horse's back to visit the place of last night's dacoity, as would appear to have been his lot once. In other words, the scope of his functioning in regard to internal security is considerably circumscribed due to the political



independence of the country. This has had a definite effect on his role in the district. He still continues to be responsible for the maintenance of law and order and for this purpose he is the head of the district police force. But because of the absence of any serious law and order or internal security problems, his contacts with the police have become less and less intimate and more and more formal. In fact, except when a very serious situation arises his role as the head of the district police is reduced to one of receiving reports of grave occurrences of crime, fortnightly reports on general situation and similar other reports either sent *suo moto* by the Superintendent of Police or called for by him. This apart, his contact with the Superintendent of Police is only on the social side and on what may be called semi-official side. In this connection, one very pertinent factor should not be forgotten. Whatever may be the position at present, it has to be realised that there can be no fundamental change in his official role as one responsible for maintenance of law and order. It should, in other words, be always possible for him to play his allotted role to the full, should unfortunately the situation so warrant.

The next important aspect of the work of a Collector has assumed so much of importance these days that it has virtually altered the role of the District Collector. As a matter of fact, all the changes seen in the role of the District Collector as well as in the picture of the Collector as visualised by the Government and the people are directly attributable to the entrustment of almost complete responsibility to the Collector concerning planning and development activities in the district. An analysis of the functions that the Collector has to perform in this field will clearly show his changed role. This can be done in two stages, firstly the stage before the introduction of the Panchayati Raj and secondly the stage subsequent thereto.

In the initial stages of planning and the functioning of development blocks, the Revenue Department in the district was made entirely responsible for this work. The formulation of different schemes and plans was based on the assessment given by the officers of Revenue Department along with other factors. Officers to man the blocks were taken from the Revenue Department. The Tahsildar, the Divisional Officer and the Collector

were directly responsible for their functioning. In short, the execution lay completely with the Revenue Department and, as the head of this Department, the Collector was intimately associated with this work. Besides supervising the work of these subordinates, he was functioning for all practical purposes as the District Development Commissioner. There was no limitation placed on him except his normal subordination to the Board of Revenue and Government and, so far as non-official agencies are concerned, the Block Committee and the District Planning and Development Committee were only advisory in character with little responsibility for effective policy-making and less for execution. It is not relevant here to go into the question of how far this system was a success. Besides, having regard to the fact that this was changed only recently a completely objective appraisal may perhaps be a bit difficult. Whatever it is, it had one advantage, namely, there was unity of command with a corresponding disadvantage, viz., there was centralisation, perhaps according to some a bit too much of it.

But his role as an officer-in-charge of developmental activities is a completely new one. In olden days, as already pointed out at the beginning, such activities were the result of individual whims rather than of deliberate planning. Naturally they occupied a secondary place in the scheme of things. But almost overnight developmental activities assumed enormous importance and proportions and the Collector was called upon to shoulder the entire responsibility in regard to this item of work. This meant the Collector playing a three fold role, firstly, that of a co-ordinator—co-ordinating the activities of the various departments in the district, secondly, of an educator expounding the benefits of plans and schemes through various agencies and thereby securing popular participation, and, thirdly, of an informant, keeping the Government informed of the effects of various schemes and plans after proper assessment of the work done in the field and thereby enabling the Government to have a complete picture. We may look into each one of these one by one.

Democratic planning which has for its objective the raising of the standard of living of a vast population leads to a considerable expansion of governmental activities and demands an army of civil servants who must all

be impelled by a deep sense of duty and moved by a missionary zeal for the welfare of the people. This naturally poses the problem of co-ordination. "Too many cooks are apt to spoil the broth!" Such a contingency has to be prevented from happening in administration. If officers dealing with various activities are allowed to function in water-tight compartments, there is bound to be re-duplication of work and consequent waste of time, energy and money, apart from delays. What is now needed is team work. Not only the officials and non-officials (a distinction which is fast disappearing if not mutually interchanging) have to work together, but the officers of various departments have to put their shoulders to the wheel and work together. The complexity of problems to be tackled is such as to call for the united action of everyone concerned. But this united action cannot be attained without someone consciously striving for it. At the district level, this role of bringing together all officers has automatically come to be assigned to the Collector. He is the captain of the team of officers in a district which is playing a national game. No team can hope to win a match unless every member of the team acts in a co-ordinated and disciplined manner. It is the job of the captain to ensure this co-ordination and discipline. In that capacity, it is up to the Collector to instill in his players a sense of oneness, a sense of team spirit and a burning enthusiasm to play the game and win the match. Apart from precept, he has to show it by practice also. This aspect of work was more or less insignificant in the olden days.

The performance of this important task has necessitated the Collector keeping himself in close touch with officers of development departments and their activities by personal discussions and conferences. He must have a clear idea of the activities of every department and keep himself posted with all the latest plans and schemes of these departments. This new role as a co-ordinator calls for considerable tact and understanding from him. He has to ensure efficiency and speed in the execution of the various schemes and at the same time to see that there is no rupture or cracking of the machinery.

It has been said that in the art of government what mattered is how the people felt in regard to a measure, however beneficial it might prove to be. It, therefore, follows that,

particularly in a planned economy, the Government had the duty of educating the people as to what was best for them. As already seen, democratic planning envisages popular participation both in conception and execution. It is not as though a command is issued which has only to be executed by the District Officer. He has to explain the policy of the Government to the people or their representatives and secure their co-operation without which the success of no scheme, however good it may be, can be ensured. As stated by the Prime Minister, the capacity of a public servant now consists in his ability to draw out people, draw out the co-operation of the people in the village wherever he is working. This applies with greater force to a Collector. Here again we see the new role of the District Collector. By sheer force of his personality and the prestige of his office, he has to persuade the diverging elements to join hands in the common task of nation building activities.

The third aspect of his new role consists in his appraisal of the implications of the different schemes and plans of the reactions of the people thereto and in keeping the Government informed of the same. Having regard to the fact that several schemes are being put into effect, it is necessary for Government to know how they are progressing. It is also necessary to see that no two schemes overlap so that no wastage is allowed. The implementation of any scheme involves both technical and administrative aspects. In regard to the former, the Government can look up to the head of the department concerned, but so far as the latter is concerned the Government has to look up only to the Collector.

Now, it is interesting to see how far this new role of the Collector is affected by the recent dynamic change in administration, viz., the introduction of 'Panchayati Raj'. There is no denying the fact that decentralization of administration as adopted in this State constitutes a major change. It is necessary to give a brief description of the scheme of decentralisation as adopted in this State. It is not necessary to go into the details. A brief reference to the broad outlines will suffice and then we may examine its working with particular reference to its impact on the district administration and the role of the Collector.

We have what is known as the 'three-tier' system. At the village level is the Panchayat

Board with a President. It is a body directly elected by the people. It is the smallest unit in this system and is expected to function as an agency for the execution of developmental schemes. The Presidents of these Panchayats within a block along with a few other categories of persons constitute the Panchayat Samithi at the block level. This statutory body has no official as its member and it controls the block administrative machinery. It functions through its various standing committees presided over by its own President. The Samithi's powers are wide enough and it can function as a very effective, purposeful and independent organisation if it wants to. The Presidents of these Samithis along with a few other categories of members constitute the Zilla Parishad at the district level with, as in the case of the Panchayat Samithi, a non-official as its Chairman. One feature of the Zilla Parishad which is not seen in the Panchayat Samithi is that it has, as one of its members, an official to wit—the District Collector—who in addition is also the Chairman of all its Standing Committees through which it functions like the Panchayat Samithi. This body has also adequate powers. In non-Samithi areas, it functions as the Panchayat Samithi and in regard to Samithis, although the Zilla Parishad has no penal powers of extracting obedience from them, it has yet powers to supervise, advise and guide the Samithis. Besides, the Samithis have to go to Zilla Parishad for getting sanctions beyond their own powers of sanction, for receiving allotments under various heads and for getting their budgets and annual reports approved. For our purpose here, I think, this brief description of the set-up would suffice. Has this innovation further changed the role that the Collector has been playing so far in regard to developmental activities? The answer is an emphatic 'yes'. Prior to this, he was *de facto* the Planning Department in the district. As already seen, he had practically the last word to say in any matter connected with planning. It came to be considered more or less his show. He had the benefit of advice, but was not bound to accept it. Through the network of officers over whom right down to the village level he had control, he was implementing the various plans and schemes. The fact that Extension Officers were becoming more important than regular departmental officers and that the former were under the Block Development Officer who was directly under

the Collector enabled him to control the activities of other departmental officers in the district and as a result of this co-ordination was easy and smooth. And above all, the prestige and influence of the Collector, who could on the spot order the execution of a particular work and see to its early completion, grew tremendously.

This underwent a drastic change with the introduction of the Panchayati Raj. All the financial and administrative powers have been transferred to the statutory bodies. Except emergency powers, he has no powers of execution in normal times. He is still the officer to co-ordinate the activities of the other departments, but he does this now in an entirely different capacity—more as a non-playing captain than a playing champion. His control over the Block Development Officers has alone undergone a subtle change with consequent change in his control of the Extension Officers. His ostensible role in the new set-up is two fold, viz., as Chairman of the Standing Committee and member of the Zilla Parishad, but his real role continues to be that of District Collector. As Chairman of Standing Committees, he has only one statutory function to discharge and that is to preside over the Standing Committee meetings. The Act does not cast on him any other statutory function as the Chairman of Standing Committees. As member of the Zilla Parishad the statutory requirement of attending the Zilla Parishad is cast on him. But these functions are ascribed to him only by virtue of his being the District Collector in which capacity he also functions during emergencies and discharges some responsibilities in filling up casual and regular vacancies and in connection with no-confidence motions. In other words, strictly speaking, the requirements of the Act would be satisfied if the Collector performs these simple and not too difficult duties. Naturally enough, the Act also does not give him any powers. But this is only as far as the Act goes. In practice, it is not so simple. This is evident from the very fact that the Collector is made a member of the Zilla Parishad and the Chairman of the Standing Committees. It would not have been difficult to make the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad the Chairman of its Standing Committees also as in the case of the Standing Committees of Panchayat Samithis. Again, as a member of the Zilla Parishad also, the Collector

is expected to do something more than the other members. Herein lies the importance of his role. It is to bring about a sense of realism. It is acknowledged that as an administrator with considerable experience he should be able to take an objective view of things. When circumstances warrant, he should be able to give the activities of the Zila Parishad proper direction. His advice as one disciplined and trained in the art of administration will always be readily available. Furthermore, should things warrant he should by persuasion and by unbiased arguments patch up differences of opinion in regard to matters of policy and execution. He is, in short, not expected to be the vacuum brake as in that case he could bring the vehicle to a dead stop and if the vehicle is going at a great speed, he could do the machinery considerable damage. At the most, he could play the part of a gear box regulating the speed to the extent possible.

Even as Chairman of the Standing Committees, the Collector is expected to bring to play all his experience and tact to see that the Standing Committees function effectively, usefully and within the ambit of law. One essential feature of the scheme of decentralisation is that it is administration through committees and bodies. No individual is given unlimited scope to act. Apart from maintaining discipline and managing the staff, neither the President, nor the Panchayat Samithi nor the Chairman, of the Zilla Parishad can in his individual capacity afford to function, by-passing the parent body or its Standing Committee. Similar is the case with the Collector. All these functionaries have to function only through the statutory bodies. In addition, as Chairman of the Standing Committees, the Collector is enabled to have control over the activities of the other departments. What he was doing as an individual officer, he now does through the Standing Committees, as they have all powers to implement schemes. It may be argued that the Collector could easily be over-ruled by a majority in the Committee. This is theoretically no doubt possible but such a contingency need not necessarily arise in practice. In the first flush of getting authority and in the initial reaction to losing power which is the period of transition and adjustments such minor clashes may arise. But when there is mutual appreciation of difficulties and responsibilities leading to adjustments, it is rather difficult to conceive

the Collector being over-ruled in all he says. On the contrary, there have been instances when the members of the Standing Committee, although they had definite views on certain matters, had, on being explained the position by the Collector, agreed to abide by his advice. This is bound to be so especially when they are convinced that the Collector is motivated by no other consideration but the good of the district. Difficulty is likely to arise only when identity with one particular interest is feared. The analogy of Caesar's wife can be extended to this also. A Collector should not only not identify himself with any particular interest but should also appear to have not identified himself with it. There may not be perfect agreement on all issues between the Collector and the members or Chairman of the Zilla Parishad, but there should be perfect understanding. That this understanding has been reached to a great extent invariably in almost all places is seen from a simple fact. When the scheme was inaugurated, there was persistent clamour for making the Chairman, Zilla Parishad, the Chairman of Standing Committees also. But this has cooled down and in fact it will not be an exaggeration to say that the opinion is changing in the other direction. In the recent Sammelan at Tirupathi, several Chairmen were voicing complaints, at times bitter, against a few departmental officers. But there was not one complaint against the Collector. Once again this resilient institution has successfully donned a new costume and is giving a tolerably good performance.

To sum up the Collector's role in regard to developmental activities, it will be seen from the above that it has been an entirely new role assigned to him. In the beginning he was playing his part with a particular background and in a particular make-up. The setting up of Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads has only changed the background and his make-up. The stage continues to be the same, the story is the same and his role in effect is the same as it was prior to introduction of Panchayati Raj.

There is only one more field of activity wherein the role of the Collector has to be examined. This is his role in the field of general administration in the district. So far as this is concerned, there has been change only in quantity of his work and not its quality. Of late, his services as a general administrator



are being requisitioned to a far greater extent than before. Previously life was simple and governmental activity very much limited. But now life is becoming more and more complex and governmental activities, as we have already seen, have increased by leaps and bounds. This enormous increase has naturally given rise to many problems which have to be tackled. Consequently, the Collector's services are requisitioned for many purposes and all of them are considered invariably important, particularly in the eyes of the department concerned. These activities include Elections, Census, Floods, Famine, Cyclones, etc.; promoting Government loans; securing investments to National Savings; visits of Governors, Ministers and very important personages; fostering extra-official activities, like Youth Welfare, district sports and social service organisations, like the Indian Red Cross Society and so on and so forth. In short, towards everything in which the Government has an interest, the Collector as representative of the Government at the district has a responsibility. Of these, conduct of general elections is a gigantic task calling for strenuous efforts. Similar is the case with Census though its one advantage over the elections is that it is not productive of much heat. Visits by very important personages is another item of work which calls for personal attention from the Collector. Similar is the case with natural calamities like floods, famine, cyclones and the like. Whatever the particular item of work, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Collector. Many of these items were not there in olden days and to that extent his role as a general administrator was not so conspicuous as it is today. Consequently, therefore, the Collector today is more in the eyes of the people than was the case even before. There has been an extension of his role in this respect.

Before I conclude, I must refer to one very important aspect. We have examined in detail the changing role of the Collector and also how this is changing. But one fundamental point remains to be seen and that is this. As a result of all these changes, what is the position of the Collector in the district today? Is he able to do justice to the important role assigned to him and, if not, what has to be done to enable to play his part in full? The key note of the district administration is that the Collector is not only in personal touch with all aspects

of the work, but also every aspect of work carries his own imprint. This view was enunciated by Sardar Gurmukh Nihal Singh, Governor of Rajasthan, in his address to the Institute of Public Administration of University of Patna in 1958: "the primacy of the Collector in the district administration is essential with the expansion of the development activities.... Once broad policies are laid down for guidance, Collectors have to be given wide powers to be able to take quick decisions without unnecessarily referring to the Government especially in routine matters." He went on to say that "there is need for creation of a psychological atmosphere in the districts that speedy justice is available to the people on the spot and they need not rush to the seat of the Government to seek redress by personal representation to ministers." He concluded by saying that "it is also necessary for the political executives to see that the status of the Collector is maintained and there is not unnecessary over-ruling of his just orders due to other partisan considerations." Thus the need to maintain the status of the Collector, having regard to the manifold nature of his duty as well as its importance, cannot be gainsaid. Just as an engine cannot be expected to pull a heavy load unless it is sufficiently powerful, so also the Collector will not be able to discharge his onerous responsibilities unless he is clothed with sufficient authority. The authority contemplated is not autocratic or unlimited. But at present his official authority, that is authority based on statutory provisions or having the backing of the force of law, is rapidly diminishing. His penal powers as District Magistrate are not significant and cannot in these days help him. The other source of his authority is his control of the revenue administration with its roots deep in the villages. Here again the recent trend cannot be said to strengthen the revenue administration or his position therein. The Block is now the unit. The importance of the Taluk is practically gone along with the importance of the Tahsildar. Sooner or later, collection work is being sought to be entrusted to local bodies. It is being seriously considered whether land revenue itself should not give place to some other form of levy or whether alternatively the work of collecting land revenue cannot be entrusted to Panchayat Boards. Whatever the outcome, the very fact that such proposals are being seriously considered with a fair chance of their materialising has further



reduced the influence of the revenue department. Above all, the king-pin of revenue administration, viz., the village officers having lost their hereditary nature are also being supplanted for all practical purposes by other functionaries—the President, Village Panchayat, the Village Level Worker, etc. It is too early to say whether the appointment of Joint Collectors to give the Collector qualified assistance (and not to relieve him of his ultimate responsibility) will, in the long run, be conducive to strengthening the Collector's position unless the stipulation of the Land Revenue Reforms Committee is accepted. The Committee were of the view that the Joint Collector should be subordinate to the Collector.

In spite of all these handicaps, good work has, undoubtedly, been done and done not because of any excessive rule of authority or coercive force on the part of the Collector, but mainly because of the personality attached to the Collector's post, because of the prestige and influence that is still being associated with the Collector's post. Despite all the changes in the pattern of administration, the Collector still continues to enjoy the prestige and confidence of the people. It is a peculiar interplay of cause and effect which cannot be rationally explained or analytically scrutinised. It may sustain him for the present, but in the long run whether this alone will suffice is a point for serious consideration. Another closely allied factor which has contributed to the Collector functioning effectively is the inherent ability on his part because of certain circumstances to get work done by drawing out goodwill and co-operation from his colleagues. But this is also subject to two restrictions. A system of administration depending solely on personal equation cannot obviously deliver the goods always because the human agency behind the machine is not of uniform calibre or temperament. Secondly, this factor is directly proportionate to the maturity of the officer and his sobriety which is, in turn, the result of sufficient experience not only in administration but in the ways of the world. It would, therefore, appear necessary to give a concrete expression to the authority of the Collector in the district. There is another important reason for doing this. The district administration under the Collector has been able in the past to meet any challenge. Be it war or national emergency, the Government could always rely on the

district administration to effectively tackle any situation. It is vital to keep the same resilience. Whatever the present, should there be a call to meet any emergency the Collector and the administration under him should be strong enough to respond to the call. A battery has to be kept charged and in use. Such a battery in case of need can be further charged and used profitably. But a discarded battery with all its cells eaten away and long in disuse cannot be charged and made to function successfully. It will have no power of absorption and will be unable to utilise energy charged into it. Similarly, if the fabric around the Collector including himself is not kept strong, any attempt at the time of need towards charging him with power will be futile and may even be productive of serious consequences.

When advocating the cause of the Collector and the need to strengthen his position, it is well to remember one point. This advocacy is intended not so much to build up the Collector as such, but to build up a strong government agency at the district level. Having regard to the manifold nature of work to be done as well as its magnitude and having regard to the necessity to provide for a strong district administration in times of potential emergency, the need to have a strong fabric of administration with a definitely recognised head is obvious and this need not be considered as going against accepted principles of democracy. This head need not be the District Collector at all. Because he has been there for centuries and is familiar to the people, he has been the obvious choice. Should it be found necessary, there could be no objection in changing his nomenclature. In fact the Land Revenue Reforms Committee has suggested redesignating the District Collector as the Civil Administrator. The point that is sought to be made is that there should be one central force to which the Government and the people could look should it become necessary.

To conclude, fourteen years constitute a very short period in the life of a nation. But within this short span, we have achieved many things under the inspiring leadership of our Prime Minister. One such significant achievement is in the field of public administration wherein a fairly efficient system has been evolved to meet the challenge of our times and to serve as an effective instrument to implement, translate

into action the high ideals enshrined in Article 38 of our Constitution which runs as below :

“The State shall strive to promote the Welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which

justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life.” The crux of the new role of the District Collector, as an important part of the administrative machinery, consists in his striving to take the people entrusted to his sacred trust nearer this lofty national goal.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN ANDHRA PRADESH

By  
RAM K. VEPA  
*Collector*

One of the administrative problems that is being increasingly discussed after the advent of Panchayati Raj is the role of the "District Officer"\* in the new pattern of development administration being set up in several States. The need for rationalisation of district administration to eliminate overlapping of functions of several Government agencies has been explicitly pointed out in the Third Five Year Plan.<sup>1</sup> At the Annual Conference of the State Development Commissioners held at Hyderabad in July this year, the role of the Collector in the Panchayati Raj pattern was discussed but it was decided to defer a final decision in the matter till greater experience was available. As a pioneer in the introduction of Panchayati Raj, it is appropriate that this problem should be further explored at this Seminar in the capital city of Andhra Pradesh.

That the problem is a real one needs no restatement. For more than a century of British rule, the District Officer was regarded as the king-pin of the district administration. He has been described as the "eyes and ears" of the Government and for most people in the district, he was 'Government' itself. Primarily responsible for law and order, and collection of revenue, he also exercised numerous residuary and regulatory functions, which invested his office with prestige. Above all, he was a member of the superior Civil Service—"the steel frame"—and recognised as the head of the dis-

trict. Even after Independence, though much of the aura has dimmed, the Collector remains the first official in the district.

In 1959, as a result of the recommendation of the Committee on Plan Projects headed by Shri Balwantrai Mehta, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh introduced a three-tier pattern of development administration called "Democratic Decentralisation", which was soon replaced by the more picturesque phrase "Panchayati Raj". Under this system, the responsibility for implementing the development programme was transferred to local bodies set up at the village level (Panchayats), the Sub-taluk level (Panchayat Samitis) and the district level (Zilla Parishad). A number of States such as Orissa, Madras, Assam and Punjab have since inaugurated similar schemes while Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh have bills for this purpose under active consideration. In view of the widespread acceptance of Panchayati Raj as a pattern of development administration, it is desirable that the role of the Collector at the district level is re-appraised.

## Historical Development of the District Officer

Before such a re-appraisal is undertaken, a brief historical survey of the manner in which the functions of the District Officer have developed is perhaps useful.<sup>2</sup> Though the district

\* The expression "District Officer" is used to designate the functionary known variously as the Collector (in Madras and Andhra) or Deputy Commissioner or District Magistrate. The expressions are used interchangeably in the Paper.

<sup>1</sup> Third Five Year Plan (1961), p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> A fuller account is available in such standard books as:

(i) Philip Woodruff (Mason), Part I. Men Who Ruled India (Founders), II. Guardians.  
(ii) L.S.O. Malley : The Indian Civil Service.  
(iii) Sir Edward Blunt : The I.C.S.

as a unit of administration figured, as early as *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, the District Officer, as we know today, is of much more recent origin. In 1800, Lord Wellesley pointed out in a famous minute "that the civil servants can no longer be considered as agents of a commercial concern. They are in fact the ministers and officers of a powerful sovereign."<sup>3</sup>

The College at Fort William, founded in 1800 to train the new type of civil servant, soon gave place to Haileybury College in the U.K., which had a curriculum lasting for over two years. In 1853, thanks largely to Lord Macaulay, the Charter Act was passed which accepted the principle of open competitive examination for entry into the Indian Civil Service (which incidentally was 17 years before a similar principle was accepted for the Home Civil Service). Haileybury College closed in 1857 (the year of the Sepoy Mutiny) since the need for a special finishing school was no longer felt, the great Universities at Cambridge and Oxford having taken over this task.

Thus, the Indian Civil Service may be said to have been established in its present form in 1853, and though it underwent several changes since, its essential characteristics of a curious mixture of intellectual brilliance, devotion to duty coupled with naive idealism endured for many years. Writing in 1878, an ex-civilian of Bengal considered it to be the "finest career in the world" in spite of its many drawbacks. "It is ennobling to a man's character to feel that he is working not for himself but for the good of large numbers subject to his administration. Notwithstanding red tape, the personal power for civilians for good or evil is very great indeed."<sup>4</sup>

The most important job in the civil service at that time was that of the District Officer; for, as Macaulay has well described in 1853, he is "the sole consul of a great province, the district assigned to him being about the size of one of the four provinces of Ireland. In all that district, there is not a single village—there is not a single hut—in which the difference between a good and bad Collector may not make the difference between happiness and misery."<sup>5</sup> More than a century later, the position was not

very different; a senior civilian of today has summed up the duties of a District Officer thus: "As a Collector, he is the authority responsible for the issue of writs and processes for the collection of revenues of all kinds; as District Magistrate, the responsibility vests in him for the maintenance of law and order in the district, and as District Officer, he carries, in the last resort, the executive authority of the Government."<sup>6</sup>

The functions of the District Officer were thus varied and it was this multiplicity of functions that endowed the office with considerable prestige. As the head of the revenue administration in the district, he had close contact with the agricultural population, so predominant in the villages. As the head of the magistracy, he was the head of the police force in the district for the maintenance of law and order, as well as administration of justice ("pure, upright and uniform" in the words of Wellesley). As the agent of the Government at the district level, it was the District Officer again that took command of any situation, particularly in moments of crises, such as flood, famine or civil commotion. After the establishment of the District Boards, he became its ex-officio chairman in which capacity he continued till 1920 when the post was made an elected one.

Necessarily, the emphasis on the several functions of the District Officer has varied with the exigencies of the time. At first it was the revenue function that was paramount which was the reason for Lord Wellesley's concern mentioned above. After the taking over by the Crown, the magisterial aspect particularly the administration of justice became the more important function for the District Officer while with the rise of the nationalist movement, maintenance of law and order emerged as more vital. Since Independence, development work and co-ordination with other Government agencies operating at the district level has tended to figure more prominently in the duties of the District Officer.

It is, however, incorrect to imagine that the District Officer before Independence was concerned merely with law and order or collection of revenue and that no development work was at

<sup>3</sup> Wellesley : Minute No. 86, 10 July, 1800.

<sup>4</sup> Life in the Mofussil (1878) by an ex-Civilian, pp. 280-281.

<sup>5</sup> Macaulay in Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 1853.

<sup>6</sup> S. S. Khera: District Administration in India (1960), p. 6.

all undertaken by him. As chairman of the District Boards, the District Officer also attended to the material needs of the people. Even after his connection with the District Board had ceased, while there was no co-ordinated effort on a national scale, valuable work was continued to be done by individual civilians as in the case of F. L. Brayne and in the Gurgaon experiment in the Punjab. In this connection, a book entitled "The Foundations for National Progress" by Sri J. N. Gupta, I.C.S. (son-in-law of Romesh Chandra Dutt), published in 1927, deserves to be read widely. He has described in the book a scheme for "constructive work to be undertaken at the district and State level, which is almost identical to the C. D. programme inaugurated in 1952. Many of the administrative problems that are being posed now have been discussed in the book and I shall have occasion to refer to them in the course of the Paper.

With the inauguration of the Montague Chelmsford reforms after the first World War, policy making, in which the District Officer had some share previously, passed to elected non-officials in the "transferred" subjects. But what affected the position of the District Officer even more was the fact that he was no longer the only channel for access to the Government. Mahatma Gandhi's Non-violent Non-cooperation had taken the fervour out of the humanising mission of the Civil Service (still predominantly British in its membership) and made the more sensitive of them feel almost a sense of guilt. This frustration caused in the minds of many District Officers has been well described by Sir Edward Blunt, himself a member of the I.C.S.: "He (the Civil Servant) has had to watch amateur administrators gradually pulling down the structure of local self-government which he and his predecessors ever since Lord Ripon's time had so carefully erected. It is not strange that many lost heart and some lost all hope and retired permanently."<sup>7</sup>

With Independence and the re-organisation of the Superior Civil Service, the "winds of change" seem to have given a new lease of life to the service. It was recognised early that

the District Officer had still an important function to perform in the vast development programme that was initiated after the dawn of Freedom. In the First Five Year Plan, the Collector was called the "natural leader in the development programme" and the "head of the extension movement in the district."<sup>8</sup> Sri V. T. K., doyen of India's Civil Servants, has categorically stated that "efficient district administration was an essential condition for the success of Plan development in India." Second Five Year Plan termed the "District administration as an agency of change towards a new social order" and the responsibility for co-ordination of the development programme at the district level was placed squarely on the shoulders of the Collector.<sup>9</sup> In the Third Five Year Plan, the Collector has been given the additional responsibility to "facilitate the success of Panchayati Raj institutions" and to "assist democratic institutions and public services in developing right conventions in day-to-day work."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in a curious way, the role of the District Officer assumed considerable significance at the very time when it was predicted by many that it would "wither away" with the establishment of democratic institutions at the district and village levels. In fact, one might even say that the very establishment of such institutions made it doubly necessary for someone in the district to watch their progress and offer administrative guidance. Perhaps there is a deeper significance in the almost mysterious vitality of the institution of the District Officer. Perhaps there is something in the paternal authoritarianism of the office that appeals to the traditional Indian mind. Whether it is so or not, Panchayati Raj has brought the district administration back into limelight and the job of the District Officer, which was beginning to be looked upon as a somewhat disagreeable chore, has assumed new dimensions not foreseen before.

### **Panchayati Raj : Pattern in Andhra Pradesh**

The pattern of Panchayati Raj introduced in Andhra Pradesh follows basically the recommendations made in the Balwantrai Mehta Report. It is a three-tier system with the

<sup>7</sup> Sir Edward Blunt : The I.C.S., p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> First Five Year Plan (1952), pp. 136-138.

<sup>9</sup> Second Five Year Plan (1956), pp. 163-164.

<sup>10</sup> Third Five Year Plan (1961), p. 340.



Panchayat at the village level, the Panchayat Samiti at the sub-taluk level, and the Zilla Parishad at the district level, embodied in the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959. (The Panchayats in Andhra area are regulated by the Madras Village Panchayats Act, 1950 and in Telangana by the Hyderabad Gram Panchayat Act, 1956, but a more comprehensive bill for the entire State is said to be under preparation). The new pattern of local administration was inaugurated on November 1, 1959, with 14,511 Panchayats and 235 Panchayat Samitis and a month later 20 Zilla Parishads (one for each district) were also established. The entire State is delimited into 445 blocks and twice a year, new Samitis are brought into being; the number of Samitis today is 310, and it is expected that by October 1963 the whole State will be covered with Panchayat Samitis.

The Panchayat is the base of the Panchayati Raj pattern, which is basically designed to give greater scope for rural areas to participate in the Community Development programme. A Panchayat is formed for groups of villages and where the annual income exceeds Rs. 10,000/- the services of a full-time Government official are also provided. The panchas are elected by the village, and they, in turn, elect a President (Sarpanch). The Panchayats are empowered to levy certain taxes such as house tax, profession tax, vehicle tax, etc. to augment their meagre resources for the development of the village. They can also levy special agricultural tax for undertaking specific projects of benefit to the community but only a few Panchayats have taken advantage of this provision. Besides these resources, the Government allocates funds in proportion to the population and land assessment in the village. There is also an Equalisation Fund to benefit Panchayats in backward areas. In spite of these several sources of revenue, most Panchayats suffer from paucity of funds for undertaking even the smallest of projects and have an annual income of less than Rs. 1,000.

The middle tier in Panchayati Raj is the Panchayat Samiti, which has emerged as the strongest unit of the three-tier structure. A Samiti area covers roughly 150 sq. miles and has a population of about 66,000. A Panchayat Samiti consists of all the Presidents of the Panchayats of the area together with six co-opted members (co-option being by election) to

represent Women, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Co-operative Institutions and Public Affairs. All the members elect a President and Vice-President as also 6 Functional Standing Committees dealing with Agriculture, Industries, Education, Works, Finance and Social Welfare respectively. The President of the Samiti presides over all the six Standing Committees. The Chief Executive Officer of the Samiti is the Block Development Officer, who is a full-time gazetted Government officer. He is aided by Extension Officers in the fields of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Engineering Works, Co-operation, Panchayats, Rural Industries, Education, Social Education, Public Health, and Women's Welfare, who are qualified personnel belonging to the respective technical departments. There are also 10 Village Level Workers (Male) and 2 Gram Sevikas (Women) who are allotted 3-5 villages each for intensive field work. Each Samiti is at first formed as a Pre-Extension block for one year to make a comprehensive survey of the needs of the area; it then enters a stage I period of intensive development for a period of five years and then a stage II period of 5 years, when Government allotments are reduced.

At the district level, a Zila Parishad is formed consisting of the Presidents of all the Panchayat Samitis in the district, representatives of the non-block areas (elected by the Presidents of the Panchayats), members of the State Legislature and Parliament, the District Collector and four co-opted members to represent Women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Chairman is elected by the Zila Parishad which also elects five Standing Committees (all of which are presided over by the Collector) to deal with Planning, Agriculture, Industries, Education and Finance. The Zilla Parishad has original jurisdiction in respect of Secondary Education, Major Roads, Minor Irrigation, Non-Samiti areas, and Social Welfare schemes. It has supervisory functions in respect of the budgets, programmes and targets of Panchayat Samitis and also allocates funds made available by development departments to the various areas in the District. The Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad is the Secretary (belonging to the State Civil Service) aided by two Deputy Secretaries. The Engineering personnel of the Zilla Parishad have been recently merged into a unified Engineering Service Cadre headed by an Executive Engineer.

Both Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads receive funds from the Government on the basis of population and land assessment. Cess at the rate of Re. 0.31 nP. in a rupee\* is collected on land assessment and distributed to the three tiers as also a per capita levy of Re. 0.25 nP. Similarly, a 5% surcharge on Stamp duty is distributed between the three bodies. Besides these specified funds, there is an Equalisation grant to aid the backward areas. For the Panchayat Samitis, there are also funds to implement the basic C.D. programme to a tune of Rs. 12 lakhs in the stage I period and Rs. 5 lakhs in the stage II period. The various Government departments place funds at the disposal of the Zilla Parishad (for allocation to the Samitis) for implementation of programmes, previously undertaken by the departmental agencies. In fact, the Panchayat Samiti has emerged in recent years as the main executive agency for the development schemes and is required to obtain matching contributions for most schemes from the public, partly in cash and partly in Shramdan. The Panchayat Samitis are also empowered to collect taxes, but as has been pointed out by various Study Teams, there has so far been a marked reluctance on the part of these bodies to augment their incomes in this manner.

The Collector, as the Chairman of all the Standing Committees of the Zilla Parishad, which transact most of the business of the body (except passing the budget and general policy matters) holds a pivotal position in the pattern. This is further enhanced by two provisions in the Act (Secs. 50 and 62) which confer additional powers on him. By the former section, the Collector is empowered to direct anything to be done in anticipation of the sanction of the Standing Committee, if in his opinion, such an act is necessary for the safety and welfare of the public. Sec. 62 authorises a Collector to suspend a resolution of the Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad if, in his opinion, "its execution is likely to cause danger to human life, health or safety or is likely to lead to riot or affray".

Besides such statutory provisions, the influence of the Collector depends even more on his own "involvement" in the development programme. By frequent visits to Panchayat Samitis and establishing close contacts with the Presidents of the Samitis, he is in a unique posi-

tion to appreciate their difficulties and to advise them on problems confronting them. They, in turn, are benefited by the close watch that is kept by him on the work of the Block Development Officer and the Extension staff, as also on the technical guidance provided by departmental officers at the district level. The Collector also holds a bi-monthly co-ordination meeting attended by Block Development Officers and departmental officers at which administrative difficulties in the implementation of the programme are fully discussed. Ultimately, it is the close personal interest the Collector takes in the development work that makes his office so important in the pattern of Panchayati Raj.

### Some Generalisations

After two years of working Panchayati Raj in the districts, it is possible to draw some conclusions on the impact of the new pattern on district administration in general, and on the work of the District Officer, in particular. These conclusions are necessarily somewhat subjective and hence highly tentative; it is hoped, however, that their statement here will provoke some thought and discussion:

(i) With the introduction of the C.D. Movement, and particularly after Panchayati Raj, there is a new upsurge of activity in the rural areas of the district. Many villages are, today, humming with new activity and there is justifiable pride in local achievements such as the construction of a school building, the laying of a road or the digging of a well. The centre of gravity of the administration (which consists of both 'policy' and 'execution') may well have shifted back to the district, where it was a century back. While policy continues to be framed at the State headquarters, it is influenced increasingly by local needs and local conditions. Whether the focal point in the district itself is the Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad is somewhat debatable though it certainly is not the Village Panchayat; a purely personal opinion is that it is the Panchayat Samiti that has become the centre of the development administration. Perhaps this is just as well, for it meets half way the "purists" who want Village Panchayats to be all-powerful and others who plead for more effective supervision by the Zilla Parishads. Whatever the detail, it is clear that the district

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\*A proposal to raise this figure to 0.50 has just been accepted.

has again become an important entity in the administrative structure.

(ii) This increase in the importance attached to the district in the development programme has also enhanced the importance of the work of the District Officer. No longer is his work considered remote, on the periphery of the important matters dealt with by the State and Central Governments. It has become vital, at the heart of the development programme that has been accorded top priority in the country today. And the man who is generally held responsible for seeing that the development programme is implemented according to schedule is, as stated earlier, the District Officer. This invests his office with a new prestige and a new status, not unlike that which was given to him even half century ago.

(iii) With increasing powers vested in the new local bodies, there is a tendency on the part of some of them to regard their new powers as so much patronage to be distributed on a group or regional basis. Such a feeling is perhaps human and is not to be lightly scoffed at. Pressure groups operate at all levels and the elected heads of these new bodies are naturally influenced by such groups who desire amenities and funds to be channelled to particular groups or villages. In a few instances, this has reached such acute proportions as to make the Samiti itself unworkable. But the problem exists everywhere, and is only kept in check by the innate sense of fair play of the Presidents and Chairmen themselves. There is also the restraint imposed by the presence of officials in the pattern of Panchayati Raj, who have no local or personal interests. It is essential in the existing conditions to have at all levels such officials who are sufficiently powerful to prevent the display of too partisan an attitude; while it is inevitable to some extent, it is desirable that it be carefully watched and kept in bound.

(iv) The power of the District Officer today is, however, not so much in statutes or executive authority as in his own ability to persuade non-official elements, with whom he works, to accept his point of view. Though he is the Chairman of the Standing Committees of Zilla Parishad, he has no more than a single vote and he is likely to be ineffective, if he is unable to carry the members with him. At times, it may well be that his advice is not accepted due to the strength of local and group pressures, but such defects must be taken

by the District Officer in good humour, so as not to jeopardise the more important issues that require his guidance. Much depends on his personal qualities and the respect people have for him as an individual; he can no longer rely merely on the authority or prestige of the office he holds. For this purpose, it is essential for the District Officer to discern matters involving basic principles on which he should take a stand, even if the comparatively trivial ones are at times left to the whims of the local groups.

(v) In another sense too, the role of the District Officer has become more difficult with the advent of Panchayati Raj. One of the cardinal virtues of the Civil Service—political neutrality—is easily attained when one is completely isolated from the daily wrangles of local politics. But when one is constantly coming up against such politics in the dozens of matters that appear on the agendas of Standing Committees, it is a more difficult matter to appear neutral, and be accepted as such by all groups. It is important, however, that the neutrality of the District Officer is recognised by all the groups, since his effectiveness diminishes, if there is even the faintest suspicion that he is favouring one group or the other. And yet, the followers of the ruling group do expect as a matter of right a slightly preferential treatment and the matter is even more complicated when the ruling party is itself composed of more than one group. The District Officer has to indulge in a veritable tight rope-walking in wending his way through the criss-crosses of the local pressure groups, without being affected by them and recognised as unaffected by the public.

(vi) At the Samiti level, there has been a tendency on the part of some of the Presidents to take upon themselves executive functions, not envisaged in the Act, instead of providing an overall leadership to the Samiti. Sometimes this occurs due to over-enthusiasm of the President and a genuinely mistaken conception of his own duties. The Block Development Officer, in such cases, becomes merely an ornament and has no longer any power to guide the Samiti, in accordance with the executive instructions laid down from time to time. Due to the fact that confidential assessments of the Block Development Officers are being made by the Presidents of Samitis, there is a general reluctance on the part of the former

to draw the attention of the Government to any irregularities committed by the Samiti, thus nullifying the very purpose for which they had been appointed. The presence of the Collector (and the Revenue Divisional Officer) in the scheme of Panchayati Raj provides the Block Development Officer with a sense of greater security in dealing with the President and other members of the Samiti.

(vii) On the official side too, there has been a multiplicity of official agencies at the district level which might well bewilder a layman and make it more difficult for him even to know which agency can provide the relief he needs. There is further a division of responsibility in each department which also contributes to this confusion. Thus, in the district, with which I am connected, there are in the field of agriculture, besides two District Agricultural Officers, a Plant Protection Officer, a Crop Sampling Officer, a Field Manure Officer, an Assistant Agricultural Engineer, Extension Officers in Cotton, Tobacco, Oilseeds, a Sugarcane Inspector, a Simple Fertiliser Supervisor, a Scientific Assistant in Saline Research, and a Superintendent of a Liaison Farm. It is also a common feature that, particularly at the lower levels, each functionary is anxious to impress on the public how much more important he is than the others. There is consequently need for someone to ensure that the public receive the help and attention they have a right to expect from official agencies. This has always been one of the traditional roles of the District Officer and has gained greater emphasis due to the proliferation of official agencies in recent years.

(viii) As regards the nature of work done by the District Officer, there has, undoubtedly, been a major shift in recent years. Whereas formerly, magisterial work occupied a great deal of his time, it has today become comparatively small in the daily schedule of a District Officer. This is not to deny the importance of the maintenance of law and order, without which no development can take place at all. But with Independence, law and order has ceased to be a major problem, except in special areas at certain times. The separation of the Executive from the Judiciary enforced in this State since 1949 has also contributed to the considerable decrease in case work of a District Officer. In fact, there is no case work at all for him to do at present and his magisterial

work-load consists solely in maintaining a vigilance towards prevention of crime and maintenance of law and order. The gap in the schedule of the District Officer caused by the decrease in magisterial work has been, however, more than made up by the development work pertaining to Zilla Parishad and the Panchayat Samitis. (There is comparatively little work for the District Officer at present relating to the Panchayats.) The chairmanship of the Standing Committees of the Zilla Parishad makes it necessary for the District Officer to keep himself in touch with minute details of the development work and he does this not merely through files, but by frequent inspections of Panchayat Samitis. Speaking in a personal vein, a systematic programme of such inspections are undertaken so that a Samiti area is inspected at least once every quarter, which makes it necessary to visit at least five to six Samitis every month. Roughly speaking, the time of the District Officer is today taken up broadly in the following proportion:

Development 40%, Revenue 25%, Magisterial 10%, Miscellaneous (including interviews, Committees, V.I.P. visits, etc.) 25%.

(ix) A significant aspect of the development work that has now devolved upon the District Officer is the co-ordination he has to effect at the district level between the seemingly varied activities of several Government agencies. It is the District Officer who sees the Plan as one "whole" and not merely as so many fragments of schemes to be implemented and it is also one of the rewards of his office that he sees before him the concrete benefits the Plan has spread to the village. This is, in fact, one of the traditional functions of the District Officer to act as a focal point at the district level for the various Government departments. However, both the quantum and importance of the work has increased greatly with the implementation of an extensive development programme involving several subjects, such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Industries, Co-operation, Education, Social Welfare, Public Health, Medical, etc. The importance of effective co-ordination at the district level was recognised even in the First Plan and was repeated with greater force in the Second Plan. As Sri 'V. T. K.' has emphasised, co-ordination is the key-note of Community Development programme where

members of several departments have been brought together at the Samiti level to work in unison. But the Samiti is too small a unit to be viable and it is the district that still remains as the unit for all Government work. Schemes, funds and plans are all broken up district-wise and there is need for a generalist administrator at the district level to "lubricate" the development machine, so to speak, so that the several gears mesh perfectly, producing useful work.

(x) That such co-ordination is even more important with new elements introduced in the C. D. programme, was recognised by the Balwantrai Mehta Report : "At the district level, the Collector should be made fully responsible for securing the necessary co-ordination and co-operation in the preparation and execution of the district Plans for Community Development."<sup>11</sup> The role of the Collector as the co-ordinator at the district level has become greater in Panchayati Raj, since he also acts as a liaison between the official and non-official elements engaged in development work. He is not merely the first official of the district and the representative of the State Government at the district level; he is also a member of the Zilla Parishad and the Chairman of its Standing Committees whose function it is to review the progress of development work in the district. He has to watch carefully for any tendency on the part of departmental officers at the district level to be indifferent towards the development programme since its implementation is no longer under their direct control. He has also to intervene with departmental heads at State level for timely release of funds or for modification of instructions which might interfere with the smooth working of the pattern. This requires unremitting vigilance on the part of the District Officer to ensure the successful working of Panchayati Raj.

#### **Alternative Roles for the District Officer**

Several suggestions are being made from time to time as to the exact place of the District Officer in the pattern of Panchayati Raj. These are classified below and discussed in succeeding paragraphs :

- (i) Collector to be outside the Zilla Parishad;

- (ii) Collector to be the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad; and
- (iii) Collector to be in the Zilla Parishad :
  - (a) without right to vote,
  - (b) with right to vote,
  - (c) as Chairman of the Standing Committees,
  - (d) as Chairman of the Zilla Parishad.

The suggestion that the Collector should remain outside the Zilla Parishad stems mainly from the fact that, as an official, he has no place in a purely non-official body composed of elected representatives of the people. It is said that he should function more as an agent of the State Government reporting to them about the activities of the Zilla Parishad, much in the same manner as he does for the Municipalities today or for the District Boards formerly. There is some merit in the suggestion, since it relieves the District Officer of a great deal of work and further enables him to function as a "neutral" insulated from the din and clamour of local politics. But, on the other hand, there is a danger that such insulation makes him too remote and cut away from the main stream of development effort in the district, which figures so largely in the lives of the people today. Further, it is difficult to see in what manner he can watch the work of the Zilla Parishad without being allowed to participate in it. The exhortation in the Third Plan to him to "assist democratic institutions in developing right conventions in the day-to-day work" would be merely academic and impracticable. Nor would his reports to State Government be realistic, in the absence of that detailed background knowledge which only a close association with the development bodies can provide. It is doubtful whether he can effectively discharge even his other functions (viz., Revenue and Magisterial) if he is so isolated from the public, since the strength of his office today is in the close contacts he maintains with the public mind in the discharge of his functions. Sri J. N. Gupta, I.C.S., whom I had mentioned earlier, commented upon this aspect well, speaking of the District Officer's disassociation with the District Board: "His position for instance compares unfavourably with that of the Chairman of the District

<sup>11</sup> Balwantrai Mehta Report (1957), pp. 39-40.



Board, for he cannot help the people in even such matters as the sinking of a well or the construction of a village road or the establishment of a village dispensary. Weak as has been the hold of the Collector in Bengal, the recent policy of completely disassociating him from the administration of the District Board has still further undermined his position."<sup>12</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that to place the District Officer outside the Zilla Parishad (the Maharashtra Committee on Panchayati Raj goes a step further in bringing the Collector under the control of the Zilla Parishad without giving him the right to participate in it) would mean the end of the institution of the District Officer, who will become just another functionary at the District level, looking primarily after collection of revenue (till such time that this work is assigned to the local bodies). From the point of view of the Zilla Parishad also, it deprives the body of the advice of an experienced official who has considerable prestige in the eyes of the public. The presence of the Collector in the Zilla Parishad brings increased status to the body and secures for it the ready co-operation of the other departmental officers at the district level. The Collector can also make effective representation to the Government on behalf of the Zilla Parishad. Hence, both from the viewpoint of the Zilla Parishad as well as that of the District Officer himself, it would seem undesirable to disassociate the District Officer from the local bodies set up under the Panchayati Raj.

The suggestion that the Collector functions as the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad has been made so that more effective co-ordination of the various departmental officers connected with development, namely, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Co-operation, Industries, Education, Public Health, Medical, etc., may be secured. The proposal is to make these officers directly subordinate to the Zilla Parishad and the Collector to function as the "captain" of the team, in much the same manner as the Block Development Officer functions at the Samiti level. It is doubtful, however, whether a Collector stripped of all his other functions such as Revenue and Magisterial duties can control other officials more effectively than is at

present being done by the Secretary, Zilla Parishad. As has been stated repeatedly, it is the multiplicity of functions performed by the District Officer that endows him with the necessary prestige to act as a co-ordinator and if he were to be merely the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad and not much else, he is hardly likely to be able to exercise such co-ordination. It is perhaps to meet this argument that the Study Team of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development that toured Andhra Pradesh recently has suggested that the Collector may be allowed "independent jurisdiction regarding Law and Order", and "such other duties as the State Government directs him to do."<sup>13</sup> Here, again, it is difficult to visualise how a District Officer, subordinate to the Zilla Parishad, can exercise responsibility towards law and order independently or perform other duties as prescribed by the State Government. One cannot "capitalise" on the prestige at present enjoyed by the Collector and then advocate a course which would certainly detract greatly from that prestige. With the District Officer subordinate to the Zilla Parishad, the State Government will be left without any independent observer on the district scene who can report objectively on the progress of development work and the operation of the local bodies. It is, therefore, advisable that the District Officer, while retaining close touch with the local bodies, is allowed to function as an independent agent of the State Government at district level.

If it is conceded that the District Officer should be a member of the Zilla Parishad, it is obviously of little value to make him either a member without a right to vote (as in Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Punjab) or provide him a mere membership with the right to vote (as in Rajasthan). In both cases, it is hardly possible for the District Officer to play any active role, as is envisaged in the Third Plan, in setting up healthy conventions in the day-to-day work and in developing cordial relationship between officials and non-officials. He would have to play a passive role in providing information desired by any member, without any positive interest in the proceedings of the body. In Madras and Mysore, on the other hand, the District Officer has been made the presiding

<sup>12</sup> J. N. Gupta: Foundations of National Progress (1927), p. 232.

<sup>13</sup> AVARD : Report on Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh, p. 37.

officer of the local body at the district level. In one sense, this is perhaps logical; for, as the Chief Executive of the district, he is the natural choice for presiding over a body solely concerned with implementation of development schemes. But the entire issue has been clouded with such matters as the ability of non-officials to head such bodies—which is really unquestioned in a democratic constitution accepted by the country. But what the critics do not readily realise is the completely different nature of the local bodies at the district level from those at the State and Central levels. While the latter are concerned with the laying down of policies, the Zilla Parishad at the district level deals merely with implementation of schemes formulated by the State level. It is for this reason also that State Ministers for Community Development who met recently at Hyderabad have recommended that M.L.As. and M.Ps. should not hold office in Panchayati Raj bodies nor even have the right to vote but merely act as elder statesmen towards them.

However, the pattern adopted in Andhra Pradesh is, perhaps, a happy compromise. It provides the elected Chairman the privilege of being the head of the Zilla Parishad while the District Officer as the Chairman of the Standing Committees is concerned with the execution of the Development schemes in the district. Both the Chairman, Zilla Parishad and the District Officer are in a position to influence considerably the working of the local bodies whose influence is greater depends ultimately on the strength of the respective personalities. While a Chairman with strong member backing can reduce the District Officer to a position of comparative ineffectiveness, the latter has the strength of his other duties to back him in dealing with the Zilla Parishad. On the other hand, a dynamic District Officer can influence the deliberations of the Zilla Parishad a great deal and provide both stability and objectivity to the discussions. In any case, the smooth working of the Zilla Parishad depends on the co-operation and understanding between these two individuals, and happily the experience in Andhra Pradesh so far has been most encouraging, in spite of gloomy forebodings made at the time the scheme was introduced two years back. There has been not a single instance reported of any major differences of opinion between a Collector and a Chairman of the Zilla

Parishad in any of the districts of the State. In fact, at the first State Sammelan on Panchayati Raj held recently at Tirupati, one of the heartening features was the comradeship that seems to have developed between these two functionaries cutting across artificial differences of official status. The strongest support for the critical view points expressed by some of the Chairmen of Zilla Parishads came from Collectors, who as partners in running the Zilla Parishads could appreciate their difficulties better than State Heads of Technical Departments. In fact, the Minister for Planning, Sri P. Ranga Reddi, aptly remarked on the complete disappearance of the "official" point of view and the "non-official" point of view at the Tirupati Sammelan, which was characteristic of previous conferences of similar type. Indeed, Collectors have now a "personal" stake in the successful working of Panchayati Raj in view of their close association with it and both sides have gained considerably by such an association. The Zilla Parishad has the benefit of the advice of an experienced and influential officer whose word carries weight with other officers at the district level and with the Government at State level. The District Officer, for his part, gains a considerable insight into the working of local pressure groups which enables him to discharge his other functions more effectively. Further, he is in a position to ensure that the development programme in the district is implemented so as to secure benefits to all groups and areas in the district, which further adds to the prestige of his office in the public eye.

### Some Recommendations

In this section, a few recommendations for improvement of district administration are made, in view of the changes introduced by Panchayati Raj:

(i) *Unity of District Administration:* With a vast development programme under way, the unity of administration at the district level, which in recent years has suffered considerably, must be restored. As stated earlier, unless the various development agencies work in close unison, no significant results can be achieved. For this purpose, it is important that the development agencies of the Government do not regard themselves as separate entities, but as parts of one organism.

(ii) *Collector as Head of the District Administration* : To achieve the unity of administration at the district level, it is important to recognise categorically the Collector as the Head of the district administration. At present, his regulatory powers over the District officers are not wide enough to enable him to exercise adequate control over them. While he writes the confidential assessments of many of them, a more important criterion is the weight attached by departmental heads and the Government to his reports. At present, the position in this respect is somewhat unsatisfactory but, if departmental officers are to take greater interest in the development effort, the Collector must be provided greater regulatory powers over them.

(iii) *Administrative Decentralisation*: There is also a great need for greater delegation of powers to the District Officer who, as man on the spot, can take immediate decisions suited to the needs of local conditions. In fact, one of the strongest criticisms against the present working of Panchayati Raj is that much of the benefit of such a scheme is likely to be vitiated by frequent references to Government at State level. Unless the decentralisation of responsibilities envisaged in Panchayati Raj is accompanied by a corresponding decentralisation of authority, there is likely to be a great deal of frustration in the public mind. The District Officer, as one closely connected with the development programme, is the natural choice for the delegation of additional powers on behalf of the Government.

(iv) *Suitable Personnel as Collectors*: The duties of the District Officer today require maturity of mind and well-adjusted personalities to be readily "acceptable" to the public. Eccentric brilliance, which functions effectively in isolation, is no longer adequate to discharge the varied duties cast upon the District Officer today, particularly in relation to Panchayati Raj. Age is not necessarily a criterion for such maturity but, on the other hand, the heavy load of work carried by the District Officer cannot be sustained unless one has innate enthusiasm and almost missionary zeal for undertaking the development work. It is also desirable that frequent shifts of District Officers are avoided since it takes a minimum period of six months for a person to adjust himself to

the environment in the district, before he can make any worthwhile contribution to the programme. Since the effectiveness of his work depends so largely on the relations he develops with other officers and non-officials, a tenure of at least three years is recommended for a District Officer, except for special reasons.

(v) *Relief in Revenue Functions*: As regards the functions of the District Officer, it is neither possible nor desirable to relieve him of his magisterial duties which provide him with an overall authority, so necessary for functioning as a representative of the State Government at the district level. The routine aspects of revenue work can, however, be taken over by an officer of the State Civil cadre, as in Madras (where he is designated as the District Revenue Officer) or by a Joint Collector (belonging to the I.A.S.) as in Andhra Pradesh.\* Ultimately, it may be possible to integrate the revenue administration up to the Taluk level with the Panchayati Raj pattern leaving the Revenue Divisional Officer and the Collector as the co-ordinating agencies at the Sub-divisional and District levels. While the District Officer must be relieved of his routine work, it is not desirable on the other hand to make him just a "co-ordinator", since without his other powers to give weight to his office, the co-ordination itself is likely to be ineffective.

### Conclusion

For more than a century, the District Officer has been the "voice" of the Government at the district level which has provided district administration great stability. There is now an unfortunate tendency, either to replace his position by an elected non-official or to make it so diffuse that there is no longer any focal point for the district administration. An elected non-official, by virtue of his acknowledged affiliation to one group, can rarely function as an impartial head; if it is argued that this is so at the State and Central levels, it must be emphasised that the nature of issues dealt with at the district, involving as they do the minutiae of administration, are widely different from general policy matters considered at higher levels of administration. Further, as Paul H. Appleby has recently pointed out, resistance to local pressure becomes progressively easier as the decision-making level is pushed upwards.

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\* This has been enacted in the Andhra Pradesh District Collectors' Powers (Delegation) Act, 1961.

The other course of making the district administration diffuse without any focal point is equally undesirable, as it makes more difficult to provide relief to the common man and to act in emergencies.

It is not argued that any new statutory powers need be vested in the District Officer. It is rather the prestige which the Government themselves accord to him that counts far more in the public eye. It is the weight Government attaches to his recommendations and the respect with which he is treated by ministers and senior officials when they tour the district that contribute greatly to strengthen his hands. He can command greater respect from his colleagues and non-officials, when it is seen that the Government trust him.

The old moral fervour that characterised the Civil Service in the last century to bring the benefits of modern civilisation to the "natives"

must now be replaced by a more informed zeal to bring prosperity and well-being to the poor and down-trodden that inhabit the countryside. The ingredients for good administration have been well summarised in the Second Plan as "a sense of integrity, a sense of urgency and a concern for the common good"; the District Officer has still a vital role to play in supplying these ingredients at the district level towards the success of the great national effort now being made in the country.

#### Acknowledgement

I wish to express my sense of gratitude to Sri M. P. Pai, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Government of Andhra Pradesh, for having given me the opportunity to present this Paper. The views expressed in it are, however, purely personal and are in no way connected with the office I hold.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN ANDHRA PRADESH

By  
G. NARAYANA CHETTY  
*Director of Municipal Administration*

The Collector should know his people. This I learnt not from books but from my personal experience. As one who has come up through "the ranks" to assume responsibilities, I may submit that he who knows the art of getting on well with the people is a good administrator. While in the past he (the administrator) was responsible and answerable to none, today he is answerable to everyone.

With the attainment of Independence, I have sensed the end of an epoch in the administration and the beginning of another. We identified ourselves with the British Rulers, and with their departure, we have not liquidated ourselves. In those days, there was not only vast difference between an officer and an ordinary man but also between him and his subordinate. There was a gulf in their social status. We have made a supreme effort to wipe out this legacy of the past. We have come down to the level of the common man sharing his joys and sorrows. We have deemed it an unique privilege to bear the full weight of the district administration and rise to the full heights of responsibilities. The people have almost forgotten the relationship that existed between them and the officials in the Gandhian era. This is an achievement about which we, the administrators, can rightly be proud. Mr. Louis Fischer once observed that the immediate problem of Independent India was to face inefficient administration. We faced the challenge. We have never failed to adjust ourselves to a new situation. Not only steady progress is maintained all along the line but the entire machinery also has been geared into mighty activity for the establishment of the Welfare State. While venerating our fore-runners for building up such a fine administra-

tive structure, I may submit that we have turned out a golden chapter in the history of our services after Independence and created an impression that administrative efficiency can contribute more than any other single factor to the establishment of the Welfare State.

It is 10 years since the Community Development Programme was launched in our country. We have placed villages on the map of India. Two Five Year Plans are over. They have set the pattern of the Welfare State. And the current Plan and those that follow only contribute to its permanency. We have been executing these plans in all seriousness. These ten years have changed us beyond recognition. It is a very significant period. We have braved many a storm and proved that we are sons of the soil before we are administrators. We have a tremendous pride in our country, in our people and in our leaders. We have a full sense of responsibility; conscious of the fact that the world is watching us and our progress.

Perhaps the first and finest gift that freedom has conferred on the common man is to assert his rights. He would look you in the face now. In a democracy, the people are the masters. The administration is carried on successfully only by enlisting at every stage their co-operation. The Community Development Programme is essentially a human programme in which it is men, not machine or paper, that matters. The Collector as the spearhead of all developmental activity in the district has to deal with human beings—with their problems of life and death. There is a great human crusade to build a better order of living. Both the officials and non-officials are working together and marching forward. With the



Democratic Decentralisation in our State, we have shed our official character in order to deal with our people and make them feel that we are partners in the march of progress. With the establishment of Panchayati Raj in our State by formation of Panchayats, Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads, the people feel that Government is brought nearer to them and run by large numbers of people. It is my personal experience that if we approach the people in a friendly, reasonable and affectionate way, their response is extremely good. And we know what great impression will have been created both on us and on them too. Their prevailing outlook and modes of thought have undergone a revolutionary change. We have to change to the changing circumstances. There can be no set pattern or rigid pattern of

administration for we are dealing with new ways of life. Our thinking must therefore be adaptable and dynamic as we are now mostly concerned with the proper adjustment of relationships, and in administration a number of different kinds of relationships are involved. In these rapidly changing and challenging days, our greatest need is not a set pattern of administration but adaptable administrators. I fear I have indulged much in loud thinking. Let me close with a quotation from Mr. W. O. Lester Smith on "The Impact of Education on Society" :

"Seek not to count the future waves of Time;  
But be you satisfied that you have light  
Enough to take your step, and find your  
foothold."

## THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR

IN

### ANDHRA PRADESH

By

K. VASUDEVA RAO

*Collector*

The District Collector is the representative of the Government at the District level. His main duties are maintenance of Law and Order, collection of Land Revenue and conduct of Elections. He is the eyes and ears of the Government and the Government looks to the Collector for any important matter which takes place in the District. After the advent of the First Five Year Plan, the role of the Collector began to change. The Community Development Programme, which is the means for improving the conditions of the masses, was launched on October 2, 1952. Since then the district Collector has been functioning as the District Development Officer and the emphasis is shifted from Law and Order to Planning and Development. Under the Community Development Programme, the country has been delimited into Development Blocks. Each Block is considered as an unit of administration in the Community Development scheme. The entire country will be covered by 1963 under this programme. At present the Block is the unit for development programme and Tahsil is the unit for Revenue administration. It remains to be seen how these two units would be adjusted after the whole country is covered by development programme, i.e., after 1963.

The role of the Collector is entirely changed in the set-up of the Community Development Scheme. Advisory Committees were formed consisting of M.L.As. of the District and other prominent non-officials. The Collector functioned as the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and co-ordinated the activities of the various Departments at the District level. He was charged with the responsibility of implementation of the Community Development programme. Thus the role of the Collector under-

went a great change. It became his function to draw out co-operation of the people for the implementation of the Development programme. Following observation of the Prime Minister would show what the Government expects of its public servants:

"The basic test of an officer in New India would be whether he can draw out the co-operation of people. If the officer who is in-charge cannot do that it does not matter how clever or able he is just not suitable for the task."

The District Collector who is the head of the District administration has to set the example which will be emulated by other District Officers.

In the year 1958 Balwantrai Mehta Committee submitted its recommendations to the Government of India and the National Development Council endorsed the recommendations of this Committee on January 12, 1958. This was in regard to the steps to be taken for the introduction of Democratic Decentralisation. The Government of Andhra Pradesh, after mature consideration, decided to accept the recommendations, of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee. The broad outlines of Democratic Decentralisation are as follows:

- (1) Democratic Decentralisation of power should be in the shape of a three storied structure; Gram Panchayat at the Village level; Panchayat Samithi at Block level and Zilla Parishad at the District level.
- (2) There should be genuine transfer of power and responsibility to those three stories.

- (3) Adequate resources to be transferred to the new bodies to enable them to discharge their duties.
- (4) The Community Development Programme should be implemented through these bodies.
- (5) System evolved should be such that should facilitate further devolution and dispersal of power and responsibilities in future.
- (6) The governing principle of the scheme is that in a democratic set-up the entire community cannot be built up by the isolated efforts of any single individual or even the Government as a whole. It should be done by concerted, purposeful and sustained endeavours of whole people, people's representatives and people's servants.

The Andhra Pradesh Government introduced the three storied organisation on November 1, 1959. Prior to this ad hoc Panchayat Samithis were constituted in this State immediately after the decision of National Development Council in July, 1958. The working of the ad hoc Panchayat Samithis was watched for a period of one year and on the progress shown by the Samithis it was decided to cover the whole State by the Panchayati Raj. Thus the whole concept of administration underwent a change. The emphasis has been laid on the capacity to co-ordinate the activities of the various Departments and drawing out co-operation from the duly elected public representatives. The Collector has now to foster the growth of leadership and to guide the representatives of the people in the art of administration. The essential qualities of an officer are now sincerity of purpose, persuasion, patience, sympathetic understanding, good counsel and tact. Unless the above qualities are developed to the fullest extent it is difficult for the District Collector to discharge his role in the present set-up.

Gram Panchayat is the ground floor of the three storied building. The Collector has various statutory powers under the Gram Panchayat Act to supervise and to guide the administration at the village level. He can dissolve any Panchayat if in his opinion the Gram Panchayat is not functioning properly.

He can take suitable steps against defaulting Panchas in case of misappropriation of public funds, etc.

At the Samithi level, the District Collector can attend the meetings of Panchayat Samithis or its Standing Committees. He has power to recommend to Government for supersession or dissolution of the Panchayat Samithi, if the Samithi fails to exercise the powers given to it or exceeds or abuses any of the powers conferred on it.

At the Zilla Parishad level, he is the voting member of the General Body. He is the Chairman of the Standing Committees, which are the executive bodies of the Zilla Parishad. He is charged with the responsibilities of carrying out the functions of the Zilla Parishad. He is the only voting member of the Zilla Parishad as a public servant. The functions of the District Collector as the Chairman of the Standing Committees are a little embarrassing in their nature. His position is also irksome. He has to preside over a body on which he has no control. The members of the Standing Committees are all non-officials. Unless the District Collector gains the trust and confidence of the members, he cannot put his weight and thus there is every likelihood of the District Collector becoming ineffective and the prestige of the Government would be lowered. He has a double role to play. He is answerable to the Zilla Parishad as the Chairman of the Standing Committees and he is also answerable to the Government for all the omissions and commissions of the Standing Committees.

There are two schools of thought in this State regarding the position of the District Collector in the new set-up.

The first school feels that there is no place for the Collector in the Zilla Parishad. He should be an ordinary member and keep administrative watch over the working of these institutions as a District Collector.

The other school considers that the District Collector has to be closely associated with these institutions, if it is expected to keep the Government informed of the way in which these institutions are functioning. Unless he is given his due role he will not be in a position to know

what is happening actually and cannot have any intimate knowledge of the day-to-day working of the Zilla Parishad and the other two bodies through Zilla Parishad. All the Chairmen of Zilla Parishads in Andhra Pradesh have passed a resolution and also represented to the Parliamentary Delegation which visited Hyderabad to study the working of Panchayati Raj that the Collectors should not be the Chairmen of the Standing Committees. They informed the Delegation that they had full co-operation from the Collectors but as a matter of principle they expressed their view that there should be only one Chairman in the Zilla Parishad.

The Proceedings of the Panchayat Sammelan conducted at Tirupathi in October, 1961, revealed that the gap between officials and non-officials is becoming narrow. After working for two years in the Panchayati Raj, the non-officials have begun to appreciate the difficulties experienced by the officers in carrying out the programme. The officers also have realised that they have to serve the public and that there is no difference between the officials and non-officials. The observations of the Prime Minister quoted above are being put into practice. The officials and non-officials are working as complementaries to each other in planning future India.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN ASSAM

By  
K. SAIGAL

*Deputy Commissioner*

Anybody who has joined service after the coming into effect of the Constitution is faced with two major difficulties in approaching a subject like the changing role of the District Officer. Firstly, he has no actual first-hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing before Independence, although, of course, he can get a general idea by referring to various books and papers published on the subject. Secondly, and perhaps more important, in the rapidly changing kaleidoscope that has been the pattern of District administration during the past decade, he has been too active a participant to be really able to accurately assess the various changes that have taken place. A spectator sees much more of the game than a player and so those immersed in District administration have naturally to start with an initial handicap.

My own experience in the district may be said to be of nearly five years' duration out of which two have been spent as a District Officer, two as a Sub-Divisional Officer and one as a spectator-trainee Assistant Commissioner. Even in these few years many changes have taken place in the general administrative pattern of the district and what follows is a short and at times, I am afraid, a rather inadequate attempt at recapitulating some of the changes.

When I first joined as an Assistant Commissioner in 1955, the district pattern had already moved quite far from the regulatory law and order administration. The picture that we had got from the books of a District Officer who spent 15 days or more in a month on touring, who disposed of petitions on the spot, held Jamabandi camps to assess revenues to be paid, held local inquiries into disputes and listened to the grievances of the ryots and himself redressed them, seemed already to have become

a thing of the past. For the amount of time that the District Officer had to spend in attending to developmental matters, informing and educating public opinion, keeping in active touch with non-official opinion, supervising, co-ordinating and guiding the rapidly expanding administrative set-up seemed to leave him very little time for trials and settlements of disputes on the spot. This tendency was further accentuated by the creation of the posts of Additional Deputy Commissioner-cum-Additional District Magistrate in almost all the districts which made it possible for the District Officer to delegate more and more of the routine and statutory responsibilities in the magisterial and revenue fields to his aide. Since then, the growing emphasis on Panchayati Raj, State Trading in foodgrains, the growth and development of an integrated net-work of co-operatives has further increased this tendency on the part of District Officers to delegate more and more of the routine administration to the additionals who have been vested by Government with almost all the statutory powers of the District Officer. The general trend seems to be in actual functioning for the District Officer to do less and less original work like trial of cases, revenue appeals, etc., and to spend his time more on such intangibles as co-ordination, integration of schemes and plans, building up of personnel at all levels of the administration, training of men, seeking the co-operation and participation of the people, informing and educating the public, and finally organising a sound system of planning based on the participation of the people as well as on the best economic, statistical and technical opinion available.

Another change that has taken place in the role of the District Officer has been for him to



assume some of the "secretarial" and "head of department" functions and, naturally, to that extent giving up some of his executive ones. This change has been necessitated by the growing number of Development Blocks as well as the handing over of functions like control of prices, supervision of co-operatives, etc., to the District Officer. The result has been that in co-ordinating the activities of all the various departments and the large number of Development Blocks the District Officer is perforce obliged to lay down a general policy for all the departments and blocks, a function which is traditionally that of the Secretariat. The delegation of powers of sanction of schemes of the Community Development Blocks has also given the District Officer powers analogous to those of a head of department. The result has been that the District Officer's headquarters establishment has grown from a small office mainly dealing with revenue and magisterial matters into a complex organization in which different establishments pertaining to Development, Supply, Elections, Acquisition and Requisition, District Transport Office and Excise come under the District Officer's control. With the growth in the number of cases as well as the expansion in the duties of the Revenue Department, the revenue and magisterial establishments have also grown considerably with the result that the task of keeping this growing and complex organization in check has become so onerous that it is becoming increasingly difficult for District Officers to spend as much time on touring, local trial of cases and Jamabandi camps as was the case in the past.

The above is only a general assessment of some of the broad changes that have taken place in the district. When we come to defining the changes in functions, however, we are faced with a conundrum because (as will be seen from the functions of a District Officer delineated in Appendix 'A') on paper at least the functions of the District Officer today are almost substantially the same as what they were in the past. The difficulty in the district has always been that the powers of the District Officer have been more undefined than defined. The District Officer has always been the Government's representative at the district level and functioned as their principal executive agency at that level; he has always been in charge of the collection of all revenues due to the State; his responsibility for maintaining

law and order and for taking such preventive measures as were necessary to preserve the public peace have been there from the very beginning; in a general way he has always been overseeing the work of all the other departments except the judicial; he has also been promoting the welfare of the people, organizing co-operatives, improving agriculture, encouraging Panchayats and in all other ways looking after the welfare of the people. In what way then has the role of the District Officer changed in the last decade or so?

The answer lies not in that many new functions as such have been allotted to him but in a shift of emphasis. First, and perhaps the foremost, change has been due to the orientation towards a dynamic process of growth and the acceptance of economic and social goals as the final ends of all policies. This shift in emphasis has led to far-reaching effects in almost every function of the District Officer. A look at only the law and order, magisterial and revenue functions of the District Officer (his traditional roles) will be enough to illustrate the point. For maintenance of law and order in the past the idea had been to prevent breach of peace at almost any cost while now-a-days not only has the law and order to be maintained but it has to be done by the use of the minimum force and that also after creating a favourable climate of public opinion. This has naturally made the job of the District Officer much more complex. In magisterial work also a marked shift has taken place. In Lakhimpur district, where I happen at present to be the District Officer, even as late as 1940, one finds from the inspection notes that the District Officer used to personally take up cases, transfer cases and even do such relatively minor things like renewal of gun licences. Since then the position has substantially changed. The total institution of cases in those days was about a thousand while today it has risen to more than twelve times that number. The result is that whereas the officers' strength then was only two or three subordinate magistrates and one honorary magistrate (there being no additional Deputy Commissioner which post was only created in 1943-44), today in the same district we have almost fifteen officers and an Additional District Officer. Not to speak of such relatively insignificant work as renewal of gun licences, the District Officer has no time to actively participate in any magisterial work and the

magisterial branch functions more or less as a separate department under the Additional District Officer with the District Officer over-seeing it. In relations with the police also, there has been a marked change. In the past District Officers made it a special point to inspect thanas and in other ways maintain active contact with the members of the police force. Now-a-days I doubt if any District Officer goes beyond the District Superintendent of Police.

The shift in revenue work has been much more marked and varied. Almost up to 1940, title to land in Assam was given on the basis of actual possession. Now with the growing land hunger and the growth of a social consciousness ceilings have been laid on the amount of land that any one person may hold. The result has been that whereas previously the powers of settlement and mutation lay with the Sub-Deputy Collectors (Tahsildars) now the powers of settlement (as well as mutation) have been centralized to a large extent and in many cases even taken to the Secretariat. On the District Officer's powers of settlement also many checks and curbs have been placed and an advisory board consisting of members of Parliament, members of the Legislature and other influential non-officials has been formed with certain well defined powers. For example, no town land can be settled without the approval of the Board and in most cases required to be referred to Government the approval of this Board is necessary before the proposal can be sent. As a result of this growing consciousness about land the mutation procedure has also been considerably tightened up and in many cases reference to Government is necessary before the Sub-Deputy Collector can pass orders. The result of all this has been a centralization of settlement powers and the relegating of things like detection of concealed cultivation, checking of land revenue assessments and other allied matters to the back ground due to more or less complete utilization of land. Now-a-days in Revenue matters more stress is coming to be laid on flood relief, issuing of agricultural, cattle and seed loans, rehabilitation of landless and erosion affected people, removal of encroachments, acquisition and requisition of land for national projects as well as for work of public importance like flood protection, drainage, roads and other works of developmental nature as well as on work pertaining to land reforms generally.

Another marked shift in emphasis has taken place with the democratisation of the country. The growing need for associating non-official opinion with the administration at the level of the district has resulted in a large number of advisory bodies being formed under the chairmanship of the District Officers. These bodies deal with matters ranging from settlement of land and other revenue matters to issue of cement and C. I. Sheet permits, regulation of food prices and issue of licenses for transport. Advisory bodies dealing with minorities, refugee rehabilitation, and development have also been formed under the aegis of the District Officer and the trend seems to form more and more such bodies. These advisory committees take up a lot of the time of the District Officer and when to this is added the need for meeting non-officials very frequently so as to understand their points of view as well as to inform them of the difficulties being faced by the Administration, it would not be too much to say that more than half of the time of the District Officer is thus spent. On top of this he has to co-ordinate and integrate the work of various departments so as to see that there is no over-lapping or dissipation of the energies of Government.

A new role has now been cast on the District Officer with the introduction of Panchayati Raj while this has to some extent relieved him of the burden of supervising and looking after the Community Development programme; at the same time new duties have been entrusted to him and he has now to ensure that in the formative state of the panchayats administrative efficiency is not allowed to suffer. For some time to come he will also have to continue to work as a guide, friend and philosopher of the new bodies set up without becoming too officious. It will also be part of his job to resolve any differences that may arise either due to a clash of personalities or otherwise between the Block officials and the elected representatives. The exercising of control to ensure that the different panchayats function within their own sphere of responsibility and do not come into clash with other Panchayats, Local Bodies or the State Government will also be a part of the job of the District Officer.

Panchayati Raj has only recently come in and it is really too early to forecast the role that the District Officer will be called upon to play but due to the increased

accent on planning and the making of the block as the basic unit for planning and development, the District Officer will certainly have to co-ordinate the activities falling in the State sphere with those falling within the sphere of the Panchayats. In Assam the District Level Body for co-ordinating the plans of the different Panchayats, namely the Mahkuma Parishad is presided over by a non-official and although a link is maintained with the District Officer by the District Development Officer being the Secretary of the Mahkuma Parishad, the job of co-ordination and integration will have to be done by a process of consultation and mutual adjustment rather than through any statutory power as such. Also as the economy develops and the process of planning becomes more and more technical it will be a part of the District Officer's job to ensure that the Panchayats get all the assistance in the form of sociological, technological and economic data as well as in the technical mechanics of planning and this will require a great deal of tact and resilience on his part for often this advice would be at variance with the local pressures.

It is apparent then that in the past decade the growing emphasis on the need for rapid development and the democratisation of the administration have more and more tended to cast the District Officer in a role of dealing more with intangibles than tangibles. Whereas previously he was directly associated with the Revenue, Magisterial and Police administrations now he has more and more to work through others and the administration to that extent is tending to become de-personalised. From being the Ma-Baap of the District, the District Officer is fast being merged into a complete organization in which his job is more the creation of organizations which act in concerted efforts to achieve the objectives set than in attaining those objectives himself. He is also tending more and more to become a buffer between his organization and forces outside the organization—superiors, legislators, public—rather than associated only with one or the other. From being an individual worker he is now becoming the leader of a team for which he has to function as a catalysing and synthesising influence rather than as a boss. His role at present, in brief, is thus to see that the various organizations at and below the district level maintain high levels of efficiency and integrity

while at the same time being in consonance with the just and felt needs of the public.

In conclusion, an attempt is being made to forecast as to what the role of the District Officer is likely to be in the next decade or so. So far as administration is concerned, we are living through very rapidly changing times and so any forecast of the future can only be a very rough and broad indication of the lines along which the functions of the District Officer are likely to proceed. It seems to me that as time goes on, the co-ordinating and integrating functions of the District Officer will gain more and more in importance as the activities of the State expand and increasingly greater decentralization of functions and authority takes place. So far as revenue functions are concerned, the purely revenue aspect will go on declining in importance as other sources of revenues expand and importance will be attached to only the social justice aspect, namely, maintenance of land records, ensuring of justice to peasants when their lands are either acquired or requisitioned for public purposes, etc. Increasing importance is also likely to attach to the distribution and collection of loans for various purposes, removal of encroachments, ensuring of planned utilization of both agricultural and urban land, ensuring of minimum standards of housing, drainage and sanitation and other such matters which affect the community at large. The law and order aspect is also likely to engage increasing attention inasmuch as growing development will bring in its wake criminal tendencies and social tensions which may lead to breach of peace in labour disputes, resentment of the ryots at their lands being taken away for industrialization and other tensions in which bad elements can get a good opportunity for disturbing society. There is also the likelihood of the regulatory functions like control of prices, supplies and essential commodities increasing in scope and breadth and being vested in the District Officer. With the decentralization of planning that is bound to come as time goes on, the District Officer will have to take on newer and more onerous duties in this regard. Financial control is also going to be increasingly devolved to the district and the audit and control of local bodies will also come down to the district level. Control over establishment of the Panchayats as well as different organizations will increasingly tend to get centralised at the district level and this will also

probably come under the control of the District Officer. The picture that we, thus, get of the District Officer of the future is of a person who is not only an executive officer but also one who lays down policy, issues sanctions, and himself functions as a head of a department for various infra-district organizations. His job will be more in the creation of organizations and personnel by providing a positive sense of leadership and acting as a catalysing and synthesising influence rather than in doing original work himself.

## APPENDIX "A"

### DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

#### *Functions of a District Officer*

A District Officer has to:

- (a) collect the land revenue and all other dues of Government which are collected as arrears of land revenue (such as income-tax, sales-tax, decrees by judicial courts, etc.).
- (b) see that the land records are properly maintained.
- (c) see to the maintenance of law and order.
- (d) control and supervise the subordinate magistracy.
- (e) administer the jails and sub-jails to some extent and look into the working of the village police.
- (f) look after supply matters including imposition of controls, distribution of controlled commodities, etc.
- (g) function as the District Registrar.
- (h) in the sphere of local administration, he has statutory power over the Panchayats, Municipalities and Town Committees.
- (i) see to the effective functioning of rural development programmes and of C.P. and N.E.S. Blocks.
- (j) keep in touch with the district heads of development departments and to co-ordinate their activities by holding regular meetings.
- (k) see that elections to the local bodies and State Legislature and Parliament are properly conducted.
- (l) in general he has to look after the welfare of the people in his district and to keep himself informed of the prospects of agriculture during the season, the trend of trade and markets, rate of industrial development, wages and prices, the progress in the execution of public works, etc.
- (m) look after the collection of economic, demographical and other data like census of cattle, information relating to various classes of people like survey of indebtedness among tribal people, scheduled castes, etc.
- (n) look after the preparation of plans at and below the district level and ensure their co-ordination and integration.
- (o) keep in active touch with non-official opinion and see that public opinion is always properly informed.
- (p) see to the building up of personnel at all levels of the administration and see to their training.
- (q) see to the proper and healthy development of leadership of non-officials at all levels.
- (r) function as the agent of the State Government at the district level and to perform all executive functions which are not capable of being done through any departmental agency.
- (s) function as the chief adviser of the Government at the district level and help in formulation of policy.



# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

By  
N. AGHA  
*Divisional Commissioner*

The functions of the District Officer fall under various heads. As Collector of the district, he works under the Land Revenue laws and is responsible not only for the revenue due from the agricultural land in his district but it is his responsibility to supervise the maintenance of all records of land pertaining to the rights of land owners and the tenants and the incorporation of changes that may take place in such rights in the record-of-rights. It is not intended to discuss the routine functions of the District Officer or such functions as are common to all States in this Paper, as they will find their place in most of the papers. Such of the functions of the District Officer will be mentioned as are peculiar to this State. Jammu & Kashmir was the first State to introduce land reforms of a revolutionary character. All land in the occupancy of tenants was entered in their name as owners and rent on land due to the owners was reduced to one-fourth of the produce. No tenant could be ejected from the lands left with landlords (who were left with  $22\frac{1}{2}$  acres), except in due course of law, but a tenant could be summarily reinstated into his tenancy if forcibly ejected. It is the responsibility of the District Officer to watch and supervise the implementation of this agrarian policy and also to ensure that the subordinate staff regulate their conduct in a manner as befits a socialistic pattern of society and give a feeling of well-being to the tenants. As District Magistrate, the District Officer acts under various laws relating to crime and heads the Police and the Magistracy in the district. There was a great emphasis on his functions as Collector and District Magistrate before 1947. It is not suggested that these functions are not important but that the prestige of the District Officer which flows mainly from his power to punish or from his authority to collect

taxes is a position which a District Officer in a free India would not envy. In a democratic set-up the prestige of the District Officer would accrue from his ability to contribute in the building of the country. It is in this sense that as the Development officer of the district, the functions of the District Officer assume great importance. The District Officer today is in-charge of all the development works connected with the National Extension and Community Projects under the C. D. programmes. He co-ordinates the activities of all the departments of administration in his district, holds monthly meetings of various officers and gives his special attention to the C. D. programmes. He is also the chief vigilance officer of the district and reports laxity or remissness on the part of any individual officer in the district to Government. It is in the sphere of general responsibilities as head of the district where he is required to co-ordinate the various functionaries of the Government in the district, to supervise and safeguard governmental interests and to watch if the officers of the district are in sympathy with the broad objectives of the Constitution that a discussion of his approach to the problems seem necessary.

After Independence, the District Officer having emerged as the Chief Development Officer of the district, it has become necessary to be aware of the difference in emphasis in regard to the various functions of the District Officer. While the District Officer before 1947 was educated to believe that the administrator has to keep above politics, it should become clear that after Independence, as in any free country, public administration is part of the field of politics, which in an under-developed country is largely responsible for the determination



of public policy. But the present generation of administrators who are conditioned in one way or the other by their association with the pre-Independence administration, find it difficult to recognize that many of the problems of public administration are due to the fact that they arise in a particular political setting. When we say that the role of the administrator is changed and the old approach to the public and politics does not hold good, it needs some effort to discover that the transformation does not take place by this verbal expression. Having been educated in and having grown up with a particular background, it cannot be denied that we are all conditioned by this past and the problem is to shed this conditioning if we have to meet the new challenge. This conditioning can only be dissolved if we become deeply aware of the fact that the conditioning still persists in some form or the other. One major change that suggests itself is that there is bound to be a growing appreciation of the fact that unlike the District Officer before 1947, who depended on his prestige of authority, the District Officer today can command prestige to the extent to which he is in sympathy with the broad objectives of the Constitution and the national policy and to the extent of his responsiveness to the aspirations of the people. Having been more fortunate in the material sense than most of his fellow beings in the district, in an under-developed country it is his responsibility to throw up new ideas, take initiative without assuming any formal leadership of the people. One must have a genuine respect for people, a basic belief that most people are motivated by upright, honest and honourable objectives. If this belief is not held, at least in part, the individual will waste most of his time protecting himself against petty deceits and will lose sight of the overall objectives of leadership.

Mention the word 'bureaucrat' to an American, and he will think of anything but service. An American thinks that all bureaucrats have a common desire to perpetuate their personal power, usually at the expense of the individual citizen's freedom. In German history we can read the case of the supreme bureaucrat Meissner, who served as Secretary of State during a 30-year period under three separate regimes: autocratic monarchy, democratic republic and Nazi dictatorship. There have been many Meissners in Germany, willing to serve whatever Government held power,

regardless of its ideology and it is hard to differentiate one such bureaucrat from another. They come from similar social background, they follow a fixed educational pattern, and they share common interests. Bureaucracy to them is both a way of life and a way of looking at life. Meissner made himself indispensable to three different regimes; certainly there was no more experienced Secretary of State in Germany. The problem, therefore, is not to be looked upon as the American bureaucrat but as a Meissner.

The District Officer had fewer responsibilities before Independence and while the recruitment, the training and apprenticeship were long and sympathetic, the result was that the District Officer appeared more efficient; while he spoke chaste English, he wrote polished office notes, maintained well appointed drawing rooms with cocktail parties, maintained a high standard of life, considered himself as a member of the intellectual elite; whereas after Independence it is his ability to view administration as a whole and his sympathy with the broad objectives of national policy which is of highest importance. There is no sphere of public life which is not the responsibility of the District Officer in some form or the other.

Politics is part of every institution, private as well as public. Today, even private institutions are influenced in some degree by what government does, and government receives special attention from those seeking power or benefits. It, therefore, becomes clear that in a country like ours, the problems should not be whether we want efficiency or liberty; that one must thrive at the cost of the other that is not true. It has also been pointed out before the old conditioning is shed—that the administrator before 1947 was a luckier person, that he enjoyed more prestige and power, that he was above the rest; once one discovers the artificiality and unnaturalness of that position and understands his true place as an individual, not only in his group or in his country but as a unit of mankind, then will not only the rival claims of efficiency and liberty be reconciled but the feeling that man exists as a part of the whole will keep the human element alive in the artificial framework of an impersonal bureaucracy.

The realization on the part of the District Officer that it is desirable that there should be an increasing interest on the part of the people in the affairs of the administration, that they should more actively participate and initiate

programmes connected with their well-being, will enable the District Officer to view problems comprehensively. In actual practice the creation of this consciousness among the people is not an easy matter to achieve. I think the key problem that confronts us today is this problem of making people conscious. In this behalf, I would suggest that a seminar of officers and non-officials where experience can be pooled would be highly profitable, though the climate these days is against seminars and conferences and we, civil servants, are temperamentally averse to the frequent conferences and seminars, but a seminar for the purpose mentioned above would serve a useful purpose.

The District Officer has to keep in view certain basic facts. One of them is that before everything else he is a citizen of a great country, and this relationship of belonging to a common motherland with the rest of his fellow-beings and that he exists as a District Officer to subserve the general well-being of the people as a whole. Once the District Officer is aware that the problem is the building of the motherland and the endeavour is common to all the citizens, his allergy to the politician, to the legislator and to the pressure groups will go. The District Officer must be in agreement with the broad social objectives of Government. The administrator can have a better grasp of the world situation if he feels that mankind is one whole and he as an individual is but part of the whole. He should, therefore, be able to see the administration as a whole.

I feel that the distance between the administrator and the people has also been created by a wrong idea having often been put forth that politics and administration should not be mixed up. In truth, the administration cannot be separated from politics. An understanding of politics is the key to an understanding of public administration. Administration makes policy, initiates legislation, represents pressure groups, acts as a pressure group itself and is caught up in the tug of war between the two major political parties. Administration is now a compound of which the politics is the base. Administration could not be immunized against politics even if there would be a strong desire to do so. All of Government is political because political parties, pressure groups and individuals compete for influence in and for the services of Government. "Policy making", argues Bailey, "is the interaction of ideas, insti-

tutions, interests and individuals . . . the four I's. Administrators contribute more to the total, in most cases, than many people realize." "Upon the shoulders of the bureaucrat", says Pendleton Herring, "has been placed in large part the burden of reconciling group differences and making effective and workable the economic and social compromises arrived at through the legislative process."

Our country is perhaps the only country in Asia and amongst the under-developed countries where democracy is established on a firm footing and the District Officer or the administrator has a responsibility which is not realized to the extent necessary—that this democracy has to be strengthened. This is possible when the District Officer or the administrator while he feels responsible to the Government should be responsive to the public aspirations and feelings. Thus, the administrator will be a person who is essential to the future of democracy. The District Officer must be responsive but uncorrupted, and second, he should enlist the creative drives of citizens and group interests in the broader planning and operation of administrative programmes. The standard which will guide the public administrator will be a conscious appreciation of what constitutes the public interest. It is necessary, lest some confusion should creep in, that the administrator is not an active member of a political party. We are not referring to an administrator who is so. The political sense of the administrator helps him to understand people and the affairs so well that he is able to get things done and leaves people with a sense of well-being.

The District Officer generally belongs to the All India Service, and such services foster integration. But the All India Services form only the upper layer of a State administration and administrative personnel at the top level can only contribute in a limited way to the forces of integration. The change that suggests itself is that if administrative schools are set up for State Service officers, such schools would be helpful to achieve emotional integration which is a political and a cultural process.

In brief, the changed role of the District Officer demands that he should possess that quality of Sardar Patel which enabled him to think of popular needs in terms of the administration and of administration in terms of popular needs.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN KERALA

By

K. P. K. MENON

*First Member, Board of Revenue*

So much has been written regarding the responsibilities of the District Officer towards the administration during the British days in India that little more need be mentioned about it while examining the subject against the background of present-day problems. The few heads of district administration during those days, viz., the Police, Medical and Public Health, Engineering, etc., along with the District Collector, who was not so much a co-ordinating agency as a mouth-piece of the provincial administration in the district, were in more watertight compartments than they are or can afford to be during these days when development and not pure administration forms the focus in priority. They discharged their duties in practical seclusion, approaching the District Collector when they found any impediments in their individual functions or where in some rare developmental matters these departments had to act together. The stress on collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order which formed the back-bone of the "Ma-Baap" administration of the British considered these various departments almost as mere adjuncts for the discharging of these two functions. In effect, only such importance was given to other District Officers as to enable the Government to collect revenues and maintain law and order in the country. At one time, a District Officer's effectiveness in being a unit of administration was measured in terms of the lowest quantum of approaches he made to the provincial authority, either in number of times or in the expenditure which such approaches resulted in. Nor was it a custom to judge a District Officer by the amount of service to the general public which his department was able to provide during the time when he was in charge of the district.

This need not be taken to mean that the British Government were indifferent to the welfare of the community or that they grudged every pie that was spent towards improving its standard of living. Without enumerating the benefits derived from the administration by the British in India which were taught to children in the schools during those days, the fact that the Government realised their duties to the governed is clear from the proceedings of the various Royal Commissions which were instituted in practically every field of public administration extending from self-government to public health and improved agriculture. In spite of these, however, there was a film of unreality over every attempt made in the various fields of human activity, due to the fact that remedies were prescribed not after a complete diagnosis but from the detached stand-point of the ruler towards the ruled. This attitude naturally spread downwards into the very roots of district administration with the result that, leaving alone the much talked about principles of "no-taxation without representation", etc., the effectiveness of a well-intentioned measure was diluted at every step until the public were hardly in a position to appreciate or enjoy the benefits which were meant for them. Another aspect of the old administration was the small share which the people had in either formulating or giving their opinions upon the schemes which were meant for them either in the administrative or in the developmental field. The administrative pyramid was very much in evidence, practically in all directions coming from the top with only such consultations and decentralizations as were offered by the limited democratic institutions of District Boards, Taluk Boards, etc.

With this enforced apathy at the top and

lack of pressure and incentive from the bottom, the District Officer in the old days could not be blamed if he took the line of least resistance and acted more as the brake than the accelerator. He viewed the progress made by the community not as something towards which the energies of every participant should be bent, but as something inevitable and to be made as slow as possible, consistent with avoiding a bad name for himself either from the top or from the bottom. This position had to change drastically after the Second World War and the achievement of independence by the country. The two aspects mentioned before had also to undergo a complete transformation. It became the duty of the administration to remove the concentration upon collection of revenues and to share it, at least in the initial stages, with development and fostering a sense of independence among the masses. Human nature being what it is, this change could not be immediately feasible. Cases were also not wanting in which individuals and groups worked against these principles either from sheer inability to change their rigid mentality or from reluctance to change until compelled to. Whether the District Officer of the present day can congratulate himself that he has adjusted himself to the present needs of administration is not for himself to say. Perhaps, it would not be out of place to say that much more than half of them are attuned to work in the right direction to derive satisfaction from responsibilities properly exercised by larger and larger number of persons and to grudge less and less the effects of decentralisation and democratisation.

In the field of practical administration, this has come to mean that a District Officer is judged by the maximum amount of development which the administration of his department has been able to afford to the general public. In doing so, he has inevitably to balance the numerous claims made by his departmental subordinates which lead to increased amount of public funds to be spent on the cost of administration against the benefits of spending such amounts in his own particular developmental field. Hence, if a District Officer is to be effective, he is to be prepared for a certain amount of unpopularity among his subordinates both in spending as little as possible towards the cost of administration, as also to draw forth the maximum

efforts from his subordinates and himself towards the benefit of the community. In addition to these, he has to adjust himself more and more to the impact of other fields of activity and to subordinate his own departmental needs to those of other departments, when in the interests of the community at large such other interests assume predominance. It is here that the district administration is yet in a state of turmoil. To subordinate oneself to the general need is always more difficult than to give up something now for one's own later benefit. When, on top of this, the impact of decentralization is such as to force certain decisions and actions on him which in his own opinion are against the real interests of the community, the trials of the District Officer become almost unbearable. On the one hand, he has to satisfy the various committees and councils of which he is a member that his intention is really to benefit the community and not to promote his own or his departmental interests. On the other hand, the responsibility which he has to discharge towards his official supervisors in ensuring that no blame attaches to him later on regarding an incorrect or improper decision, puts him into a dilemma from which, very often, only a sense of fatalism can retrieve him. Whether there is sufficient co-ordination within the district as in the States or at the Centre, this necessity comes to be keenly felt by an authority which has to take a final decision based upon the various aspects of a problem. It is against this background that the district administration becomes or fails to become an effective unit for decentralization and democratisation. Geographical and local interests being what they are, it has been found impossible to reconcile demands made by various units for expenditure of public funds on themselves; and the District Officers of various departments, along with the co-ordinating authority, have to function impartially, unobtrusively and usefully, if they are to fit smoothly into the administration of the unit with which they are entrusted.

It is this field of co-ordination in which the District Collector has to play a large part. As mentioned earlier, he was the fulcrum on which the revenue collection and the maintenance of law and order turned in the old days and the person whom administration turned to when anything went wrong in almost any field of activity within the district. His authority at



one time was unassailable. He had various approaches to the provincial administration which enabled him to put the interests of the public or the administration above those of a particular department. Instances were frequent in the past when, in spite of heads of departments at the provincial capital, the views of a District Collector would prevail in deciding whether or not to do a particular thing, be that the location of a hospital, police station or provision of irrigation facilities. With more and more persons taking positive interests in administration, both in the official and non-official fields, this pre-eminence got reduced step by step and year after year. There was naturally a considerable amount of heart-burning and in many cases persons were found constitutionally unable to adjust themselves to such circumstances. After the elimination or compulsory adjustment of such individuals to the circumstances, the stress came to be laid more and more on co-ordinating the activities of individual departments, the general interests of the community, the wishes of the various representatives of the people and the necessity to avoid unnecessary expenditure of public funds. The District Collector (or the Deputy Commissioner as he is known in some other States) now discharges this function. In the present circumstances, this is in no way enviable, particularly in those cases where he finds his maximum efforts, at reconciling almost opposite points of view, breaking up on the rocks of sheer ignorance or individual interest. He has also to suffer from the frustration

of imperfect and insufficient decentralization resulting in the holding up of essential items of progress by the involved nature of official procedure. There is a commonly expressed opinion that it is the non-official who suffers from the so-called red tape. A public realisation that officers who are interested in advancing the interests of the community suffer from the same sense of frustration is essential for understanding each other and for the pooling of all resources towards the achievement of a common goal. During the time when the pattern of administration was clear and consisted of a straight evaluation of various factors on their merits and demerits, it was comparatively easy for the departmental District Officer and the District Collector to come to some considered opinion and to utilise all their energies towards getting that view accepted by the person who has to take the final decision. This reconciliation is much more difficult now, since in many cases an officer may come honestly to feel that even what is the best solution may not be the most expedient for all time for the community and vice versa. It is in his ability to bring together opinions which appear at first irreconcilable, to see that individual initiative is not prevented from steady development and to safeguard the interest and reputation of the administration of his district that the effectiveness of the District Officers as well as the District Collector, who facilitates the achievement of the final decision with least friction, exists and can be measured.



# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN MADHYA PRADESH

By  
S. C. VERMA  
*Collector*

The role of the District Officer is in a state of flux; in fact it has always been so. District administration is the field of activity where the policies of Government are translated into action. It is here that the Government machinery is confronted face to face with the people. Obviously in such a field of intense activity, there can be nothing stagnant or stationary and the pattern has necessarily to change with a kaleidoscopic speed. In the affairs of men nothing stands still, and district administration being directly concerned with men whose moods, urges and requirements are undergoing changes every moment particularly in the present times, it cannot remain unaffected. We are undergoing a process of fairly rapid change, rapid change in cities, towns and hamlets. The change may not announce itself, its signs may not be prominently displayed, but it comes on and on like a fast tide, which in course of time, envelops the entire landscape. There are resultant pulls in different directions; the old equilibrium gets disturbed, for a moment it appears that the moorings are lost, but again a new position of stability is achieved. The District Officer is the pivot of district administration, and it is but natural that the stresses and strains brought to bear on the system should necessarily bring about a change in his role.

The three main divisions of the District Officer's functions are too well known to need any elaborate treatment. As a Collector, the District Officer is responsible for the issue of writs and processes for the collection of revenue, and it is also his duty to maintain the land-records properly; as District Magistrate, he is responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the enforcement of the rule

of law; and as the Chief Executive Authority at the district level, he exercises the executive authority of Government. How these three functions came to be combined in one person—the District Officer—is a matter of historical development, and is not relevant for the purposes of the present study. The system was evolved by the British when they established their empire in India, and it is indeed remarkable that even today, the broad division of the functions of a District Officer still remains the same; the passage of time has not made much difference. The steel-frame established by the British still remains. The old beams and pillars representing the revenue, magisterial and executive functions remain intact; the recent additions to the functions just fill up the open spaces and may give the frame a new look outwardly, but the basic structure remains unaltered. There has never been a sudden break from the past, and the changes taking place with the passage of time have a rhythm of continuity about them. It is perhaps not correct to say that the role of a District Officer has undergone a complete change and that no relationship exists with the past. On the contrary, the traditions of Munro, Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe still continue, and the echo of what a District Officer does today goes back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The scenes depicted in "The Men Who Ruled India" or "The ICS", particularly those of the countryside, appear so familiar that at times one begins to wonder whether time has not stood still for all these decades.

The most noticeable change in the role of the District Officer is with regard to the wide powers which he is called upon to exercise in the present times. The powers, which have

been conferred on a District Officer after the country became independent, are far greater than those exercised by his predecessor in the past. This is as it ought to be because during the British regime the Indian officers lived, either on the fringe, or just outside the orbit of major administrative decisions. Now there is no room for any distrust; besides the scope of Governmental activity has widened almost beyond recognition; hence it is but natural that greater powers should devolve upon the District Officer who symbolises the authority of Government at the district level. It is needless to say that, along with these powers, responsibilities have also increased; this is unavoidable in a democratic set-up. In fact, it would be dangerous to give power without responsibility. It would lead to several evils. Sometimes it is bemoaned that the powers of a District Officer have been greatly curtailed and that freedom of action has been considerably reduced, but this is not a statement of fact. It is no doubt correct that there is no licence to indulge in arbitrary acts, and that the whims and caprices of individuals cannot be allowed to transgress the limits circumscribed by law; but the opportunities to serve the people are almost unlimited.

The Preventive Detention Act and the Public Security Act have given very wide powers to a District Magistrate in the field of criminal administration. Similarly, with the abolition of the proprietary rights and the introduction of progressive land reforms, increasing powers have been conferred on a Collector under various enactments connected with revenue administration. Matters, which in the past had to be referred to the State Government for orders, are now disposed of by the Collectors and even by his subordinate officers such as S.D.Os. and Tehsildars. Such a development was unavoidable because with the increasing pace of reform in the field of revenue administration, there was no alternative but to clothe the Revenue officers with wider powers; otherwise the effect of new legislation would not have become visible and the intentions of Government would have remained confined to the Statute book. The time is in fact running out so fast, and the impatience of the people for reforms in various directions is so compelling that all factors contributing towards delay in taking decisions have necessarily to be eliminated. The enlargement of powers is, however, most marked in the field of executive

authority. The District Officer is held responsible for almost all the activities that are going on in his district, be it the community development programme, the construction of roads and buildings, the national-savings drive, or the arrangements pertaining to the annual sessions of political parties, or the Kumbha Mela. For almost everything the Collector is answerable to Government even though there are District Officers dealing with different subjects. It may perhaps not be an exaggeration to say that nowhere in the world has a civil servant been given so many opportunities to serve the people as in India.

The role played by a Collector as a co-ordinator of various Governmental agencies functioning in the district has come into great prominence. He is the leader of the team comprising the district heads of different departments. A Collector cannot get away from his responsibility by taking the plea that since there is an officer at the district level dealing with a particular subject he is not liable for the acts of omission and commission in that particular sector. Nobody will accept this plea. The result is that the District Officer has to take a keen interest in all the important activities going on in his district, and he has also to keep himself properly informed of the progress registered in different fields of activities. If there are impediments in the implementation of a particular programme, the district official directly in charge of that programme expects the Collector to get the obstacles removed by using his influence with Government or with the Head of the Department concerned at the State level. It is not that the District Officer has been saddled only with responsibilities, and that there is no corresponding increase in his powers. On the contrary, the advice of the District Officer is listened to with due consideration by the Government and, in the majority of cases, he is able to get his proposal carried through.

The District Officer does not derive all his power and authority from statutes, codes and Acts alone. In fact, most of the power is derived from outside the orbit of statutory authority. The greatest source of power of the District Officer is his relations and contact with the people and their representatives. If, by his integrity, hard work, courage and humane approach to various problems, the District

Officer is able to win the admiration and confidence of the people, he can go almost to any extent in the exercise of his authority; particularly in times of crisis, when the surest support comes, not from statutory authority, but from his ability to obtain response and co-operation from the people. It has been correctly observed that "in a district there is not a single village, not a single hut in which the difference between a good and a bad Collector may not make the difference between happiness and misery". It is unfortunate that so much should hinge upon one individual; if he happens to be a dynamic figure the district takes strides forward, but if he happens to be easy-going the whole district slumbers. It has further to be remembered that the common people are quick in sizing up the District Officer and his administration, and it would be tantamount to living in a fool's paradise if any District Officer is under the impression that his shortcomings and lapses would escape the attention of the people.

One of the unfortunate developments of the recent past has been that adequate attention has not been devoted to the maintenance of law and order. Law and order is, and has always been, a matter of absolute priority. The first and foremost duty of the District Officer in his capacity as a District Magistrate is to ensure safety to life and property. The foundations of a welfare state can only be laid on a base of orderly government; where there is safety for all and the rule of law prevails. In the uproar for ushering in the welfare state, the voice for the maintenance of law and order has become rather feeble and the consequences are not far to see. The recent disturbances in several parts of the country have clearly shown that the whole fabric of society is in the danger of being torn into shreds if adequate attention is not paid to the maintenance of law and order. The Central as well as the State Governments have been quick to diagnose the malady and renewed emphasis is being laid on maintaining public peace, keeping chaos at bay and inculcating respect for authority. The District Magistrates have been directed to act with absolute firmness in matters involving law and order. This is as it ought to be. A temporary aberration in this direction has already caused sufficient damage, and if the situation is not remedied, it is likely, sooner or later, to go out of control. The recent amendments in the criminal law, and the continuance of the Preventive Detention Act

and the Public Security Act have given all the necessary powers which a District Magistrate can possibly require for maintaining public peace. There is, therefore, no lacuna so far as the conferral of powers is concerned; but instances are known when certain developments in regard to the exercise of these powers have not been very happy. This has vitally affected the role of the District Officer in his capacity as a District Magistrate. It needs to be borne in mind that every crisis needs a quick diagnosis and quick action. It is quite easy to be wise after the event. It does sometimes happen that there is an error of judgment on the part of a District Magistrate in dealing with a particular situation, but if the error happens to be bona-fide, it needs to be viewed sympathetically by Government. The District Officer needs to be sustained and backed in all cases of *bona fide* errors. There should, in fact, be no fear of making mistakes; otherwise, it will greatly impair the capacity of a District Magistrate to take decisions. All cases of mala fide errors should no doubt be treated sternly, but it is not proper to have the same remedy for all ills. However, the recent developments are heartening, and it can reasonably be expected that there will be visible improvements in future so far as the maintenance of law and order is concerned. Many a time, the District Magistrates made mistakes which could be avoided if they had maintained necessary contacts with the general mass of people. The charge sometimes levelled against officers about their dwelling in ivory towers is not entirely unfounded. If one were to analyse minutely the cases resulting in a catastrophe, it would be discovered that if adequate preventive measures had been taken, the situation could have been brought under control. Preventive measures will always remain weak and ineffective as long as the district administration does not feel the pulse of the people.

In the field of revenue administration also, as in the case of the maintenance of law and order, there has unfortunately been a shifting of emphasis from the essentials. The District Officers have been so engrossed with the land-reform measures introduced by Government from time to time that their basic duties with regard to the proper maintenance of land records and revenue recovery have been neglected. It is a matter of common knowledge that the land-records are not up-to-date and that the work of the land-records staff is not being

supervised properly. Similarly, the arrears of land revenue and other recoveries are mounting up to staggering dimensions. These developments are rather unfortunate. No doubt, there have been instances of unnecessary interference with recovery work, but this, by itself, cannot explain the wide-spread deterioration in the matter of revenue recovery. The old values need to be re-defined afresh and, unless this is done early, we shall find that the position has deteriorated beyond rectification. We have inherited from the old regime a meticulously maintained system of land-records, and it is necessary that it should be kept in good trim. The slackening of efforts in this direction has already done considerable damage.

One of the significant developments of the last decade is the launching of the community development programme. Nothing like this programme ever existed in the past; except in a very feeble way here and there in some parts of the country. The community development programme has brought about a big change in the role of the District Officer. The responsibility for the implementation of the community development programme in the district has been entrusted to the District Officer, and by the nature and content of the programme itself, it has become his primary duty to generate enthusiasm in the country-side because, unless this is done, the programme will not get implemented. The programme has also defined a new role for the District Officer, viz., that of a leader of a team of officials belonging to different development departments. This has given a renewed emphasis on his role as a co-ordinator. In the performance of the development functions, proper co-ordination is very necessary so as to make the best use of the very limited resources that are available in a poor country like India. The C.D. programme has opened up new avenues of public service for the District Officer. The financial powers which have been conferred under the programme have no precedent whatsoever. It was necessary to do so because the programme has to move very fast, and no time can be wasted on procedural delays. Another outcome of the C. D. programme is the emergence of the rural area into prominence. The villages now receive the attention which had hitherto remained confined to towns and cities. The dumb millions living in the countryside have now found a voice and it is indeed heartening to see them

standing erect before the District Officer and demand that their legitimate needs should be fulfilled. The villages look to the District Officer for championing their cause and for providing them necessary protection against exploitation. Apart from the C. D. programme, there are numerous other developmental activities which have been entrusted to the care of the District Officer. He has special responsibilities towards the weaker sections of the community, viz., Scheduled Castes and Tribes, women and children. The welfare schemes introduced by Government for these sections have to be implemented with due care so that there is no frittering away of scarce resources and the benefits flowing into wrong channels. A recent addition to the list of development activities is the launching of the Package Programme in a few selected districts in the country. This is a bold experiment to step up agricultural production; it is an earnest endeavour to achieve freedom from hunger.

Fortunately the peoples' organizations have started coming to their feet. This again is a development of recent growth and has great bearing on the role of the District Officer. In almost all the States, the committees comprising the accredited representatives of the people have been constituted at the district, the tehsil and the block level. Most of these committees are at present functioning in an advisory capacity, but the time is fast approaching when they will be clothed with statutory powers. With the introduction of democratic decentralization, the powers and responsibilities of these committees have increased considerably. When the District Advisory Committees were constituted seven or eight years ago, there was an apprehension in the minds of many that these Committees would unnecessarily interfere with the smooth working of district administration. Experience has, however, shown that the fear of their negative role was unfounded. Barring a few exceptions, the District Advisory Committees have proved of great help to the District Officer. Apart from apprising the District Officer of the moods and urges of the people on various matters, the non-official members of the Advisory Committees have also shouldered responsibility with the District Officer in several ways. In fact, on many occasions, the Advisory Committees have proved a source of additional strength to the District Officer. For the effective



working of the system, it is necessary to view the role of the Advisory Committees with all seriousness. Whenever this aspect of the matter was lost sight of and the District Advisory Committee was ignored or deliberately neglected, difficulties arose, and at times an embarrassing situation was created. If the members of the Committees are properly briefed by furnishing them with all the necessary information connected with a particular subject, there is very little chance of its members behaving in an irresponsible manner.

In any case, there is no getting away from non-official committees; in a democratic set-up, it is necessary that there should be increasing participation of the people in their administration. It should be the endeavour of every District Officer to make this experiment a success because it is meant for the good of the people. In the foreseeable future no other factor will have greater impact than the emergence of the local bodies. Formerly these bodies played merely an advisory role, but now they are being clothed with statutory powers. It cannot, however, be said that these bodies will be able to attain the stature expected of them overnight. On the contrary, several mistakes will be made and several wrong steps may be taken in the initial stages. It will be the duty of the District Officer to give a helping hand whenever an occasion demands. He cannot be allowed to stand aloof and act as a mere onlooker. On the other hand, it will be his responsibility to see that these bodies do not go astray or make blunders leading to a disaster. If properly

nursed and developed, these bodies will go a long way in relieving the District Officer of his several responsibilities.

In conclusion, the role of the District Officer is changing at a fast pace as a result of the impact of various changes going on in a district. The greatest challenge is provided by the experiment of democratic decentralization. It is, however, the duty of the District Officer to foster, to encourage, and to guide these bodies; at the same time it should not appear as if a superior attitude was being adopted. It is then alone that the local bodies would be able to develop within themselves the necessary self-confidence. It would not be honest on the part of the District Officer to discourage a movement which has been sanctified by the Constitution and by various enactments, in the belief that it was not warranted by the present circumstances, that it had come a little early and that the people were not suitably equipped to carry it through. To do so would be a great sin and would amount to a serious dereliction of duty and would be inexcusable. Nothing has permanence in this changing world and it is absurd to think that while other things may change the power and authority exercised by the District Officer will remain as before. Moreover, new vistas of public service will certainly open out in a country which is striving hard to lift itself from a low level of economy and there will always be many opportunities to serve the people. In the foreseeable future, the District Officer will have a very vital role to play and this by itself should be a matter of great pride.



# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN MADRAS

By  
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*Collector*

In presenting this paper on the "Changing Role of District Officer", I labour under two handicaps. I have no first-hand knowledge of the work of the District Officer in the old set up to be able to assess in its full measure the change that has come over the district administration. Secondly, being now too deeply engrossed in the daily chores of the district administration, I am, like any other field worker, apt to be deficient in that sense of perspective necessary to appreciate the significance, direction and intensity of the "winds of change" which blow across the country today.

The change which has come over the district administration is, in part, merely a reflection of the change in the character of the State itself, a change often tritely described as one of transition from a Police State into a Welfare State. It is no doubt true that the increase in the functions of the State and its growing interest in economic and social progress have brought new responsibilities and opened out new opportunities for the administrator at the district level. The old primary functions of maintaining law and order and of collecting taxes still remain with the District officer. But these now command less of his attention and energies than the newer and more rewarding tasks of development. This shift in emphasis from magisterial and revenue functions to developmental functions has been formally recognised in this State with the appointment of a full time officer at the district level to relieve the Collector more or less completely of his functions in regard to collection of land revenue and discharge of statutory functions under various revenue enactments. Maintenance of law and order is still the responsibility of the Collector, but in a homogeneous State like Madras with a stable

administration there is very little of organised violence or defiance of authority. Planned economic development is, therefore, the main concern of the Collector. In this process of change the Collector's relationship with other officers of development departments at the district level has, in fact, become closer than ever before and the need for working together in co-ordination and in a spirit of goodwill has become more pronounced than before. The Collector, who has been the pivot of the administration at the district level, has in this process become the captain of the team of officers at the district level engaged in development work. But through all this evolution during the two Plan periods, the essential character of the District Officer has remained intact—an agent of the State Government being responsible for the implementation of the policies and programmes of the Government through the administrative machinery. When one remembers that in India the District Officer, in the best traditions of a "paternal" Government, has always interested himself in development work, the shift in emphasis from revenue and law and order functions to developmental functions alone cannot be said to be a radical break with the past. It is the setting up during the last one year of elected representative institutions at village and block levels and the transfer of full responsibility for the drawing up of plans and their execution that has unleashed forces which bid fair to bring about a radical transformation of the character of district administration. These arrangements which are compendiously known by the rather imposing name of "PANCHAYATI RAJ" are giving the district administration a new look and opening out new vistas of service for the District Officer.

Madras is one of the States which have enacted necessary legislative measures for ushering in new elected institutions at the village, block and district levels capable of undertaking and implementing a massive developmental programme.

The essential features of the legislation are :

- (i) A Panchayat for every village;
- (ii) A Panchayat Union consisting of Presidents of Panchayats at the block level with provision for co-option of members representing special interests and participation of legislators; and
- (iii) A District Development Council with all Chairmen of Panchayat Union Councils, Chairmen of Municipalities, Legislators and officers of different development departments with the Collector as the *ex-officio* Chairman.

At every one of these levels, the official machinery is fully associated with the elected body for the more efficient discharge of its functions. At the village level, the village officers who have traditionally provided the leadership in the villages have been brought into the picture and are responsible for the collection of taxes left out by the Panchayat and also assist in the drawing up of village production plans. At the block level, the Extension staff of the Community Development programme headed by the Block Development Officer have been placed at the disposal of the Panchayat Union in drawing up the programmes of development and their implementation. At the district level again, the elected representatives of the people and the officials come together in fruitful association. This new pattern of administration has undoubtedly caused considerable strain on the district administration and in particular on the Collector. The Collector is now the Inspector of Panchayats and in that capacity has to arrange for efficient inspection and audit of Panchayats. He has to guide and advise the Panchayats and Panchayat Unions in the drawing up and implementation of programmes for provision of basic amenities and for augmentation of agricultural production. To this end he has to secure efficient performance of their duties by officers of other development departments like agriculture and keep in constant touch with them and State Headquarters for maintaining timely and adequate supplies

of materials and equipments, such as improved seed, pesticides, sprayers, etc. He has to arrange, through his revenue machinery, for the prompt collection of taxes levied by Panchayats and Panchayat Unions. He has by his scrutiny of budgets of Panchayat Unions to ensure whether adequate provision is made for essential services.

How radical are these changes and what will be their long term effects on the character of district administration? There are some critics—"the root and branch reformers"—who point out that Panchayati Raj, as ushered in Madras, is only an anaemic version of the full-blooded Panchayati Raj elsewhere, and that, therefore; it does not represent a radical change of the present set-up of administration of the district and lower levels. These critics generally fasten upon the following "undemocratic" features of the reform in Madras:

- (i) Absence of any provision for the Gram Sabha—a plenary meeting of all the people in the village to discuss plans and programmes of the village as a whole;
- (ii) Association of village officers with the Panchayat and the vesting of responsibility for the collection of taxes in the village officers;
- (iii) Separation of—what may be called—"policy making functions" for which the Panchayat Union Council is responsible from the administrative functions, for which the Block Development Officer and his staff are made responsible;
- (iv) The purely advisory character of the District Development Council and the association of the Collector with it as its Chairman.

These points can be met easily. The concept of Gram Sabha, or the entire village meeting for discussing its problems seems to represent a nostalgic yearning for a past which it is difficult to resuscitate in modern conditions of living. Representative institutions which have been found adequate at State and National levels should also be found adequate at the village level provided unanimity or near-unanimity is ensured, as is even now mostly the case, in the election of representatives. Villages in Madras are of fairly large size. In our district, for a population of 35 lakhs, we have only a little over 800 Panchayats, each with a population on

the average of about 4,000. Such villages cannot be considered to be 'face-to-face' communities where a meeting of the entire adult population can transact effective business. Athenian democracy has shown that a democratic body in which all the people participate and take decisions is not an unmixed blessing, and that, in fact, it provides a little too free scope for the demagogues.

The association of the village officers with the Panchayats has justified itself by its results. It has ensured efficient collection of taxes. In many Panchayats in our district, in less than three months, the accumulated arrears of past years have been realised without having to resort to coercive process even in a single case, and by and large, Panchayats themselves welcome this, because they are aware of the need for efficient collection of taxes. The Presidents as well as village officers are beginning to realize that there is much on either side to forget and forgive and that the two by pooling their experience and special knowledge could work together for the common good of the village.

Likewise, the sharp distinction, on the analogy of Municipalities, between the functions of the Panchayat Union Councils and the executive functions of the Block Development Officer and his staff may appear to be undemocratic. In fact, the relationship between the Panchayat Union Chairman and the Block Development Officer and his staff has not been deliberately spelt out in detail, for the relationship should emerge in the process of mutual adjustments and in a spirit of goodwill as the two work together for constructive purposes. Healthy conventions are being built up and it will be impolitic and inappropriate at this stage to reduce the relationship between the two to a set of formal propositions which may not work in practice. This devolution of the powers and responsibilities to elected representatives of the people has led to spectacular results even during the short period of one year since the scheme has been put into operation. There is today a new awakening in the villages and a new sense of confidence that the resources necessary for the developmental programmes can be mobilised and that the targets of developmental programmes can be successfully fulfilled. The District Officer's role in the circumstances is necessarily changed. From being purely an agent of the State Government faithfully implementing their directives,

he has become the friend-philosopher and guide of democratic institutions at block and village levels. Having been given an indication of the resources that would be available for schemes at the village and block levels and having also been appraised of the extent of resources which will have to be raised locally, people's organizations have drawn up plans which are not merely paper plans but are operational and which in fact have been already partially fulfilled. Tasks found difficult hitherto are becoming easier. In particular, the important problem of mobilising resources for rural development is being tackled in right earnest. Faced with the task of finding resources for the fulfilment of the Third Plan at the village and block levels, Panchayats and Panchayat Unions have displayed a sense of realism and political courage of a most refreshing character. They have willingly accepted the fact that agricultural lands can and should bear a greater burden of taxation in the interests of development and have voted in favour of increased taxation—unanimously in all cases—on lands in the form of surcharge on local cess and local development rates. What is more important, the leaders of Panchayats and Panchayat Unions are now creating the necessary social climate in which the increased taxes levied can easily be collected in practice. They have also shown their vitality in mobilising local resources in the form of land, materials and labour, for the developmental programmes. The Panchayats have, thus, made the work of the District Officer in a sense lighter. The burdens and responsibilities hitherto borne by the District Officer have now been shifted to broader shoulders and the District Officer's role will soon be one merely of providing expert advice and guidance to the local democratic organizations in executing the plans drawn by them.

This leads us to the last and most important question, whether all these changes imply that in the long run the District Officer will cease to be as important as he is today and whether he will become less effective? The working of the new arrangements during the last one year points to the contrary. If power is construed not in terms of self-importance or self-aggrandisement but in terms of capacity to get things done, the District Officer under the new set-up has more powers, not less, for, he is now able to draw upon the energies and resources liberated by the new democratic institutions. The

District Collector as well as other officers of development departments today have also still an important job to do which may be briefly stated as one of preparing the people as well as civil servants alike for the fulfilment of their respective responsibilities. The role of the Collector is largely that of an "educator". He is expected to bring about a new awareness among his own revenue officials as well as his District Officers of other development departments of their position in the new set up and create conditions in which the two indispensable elements of democracy—the permanent civil servants and the elected representatives—can work together in harmony. He has an equally significant part to play in educating the people and their representatives in Panchayats and Panchayat Unions and training them for their new responsibilities. In this view his success is to be judged not in terms of the physical targets achieved but rather in terms of his contribution to the building up of an active, responsible local leadership and the creation and maintenance of the "milieu" in which such leadership can function effectively and thus initiate a process of self-sustaining growth in rural areas. With the assistance of the District Development Council, he has to review and co-ordinate the working of the developmental programmes and remove the bottlenecks—administrative, technical and otherwise—in the implementation of the programmes. He has to ensure by constant personal supervision and advice that local plans conform to and promote the broad objectives of national planning in such vital spheres as food production, family limitation and provision of basic amenities. He has with the help of the enlightened non-official leadership available at the district, block and village levels to make it clear to the people that days are over when "manna" dropped from heaven and that improved living conditions in rural areas can be assured only with concerted attempts to augment production and by imaginative, though temporarily unpopular, measures for canalising a portion atleast of the increased wealth in the villages for social purposes.

The new democratic institutions are assured of full freedom of action and too meticulous a supervision by bureaucratic agencies is guarded against. But the Collector has still in the new set up ample powers which—to quote the words of Walter Bagheot in another context—may be summed up as "(i) the right to be consulted, (ii) the right to encourage, and (iii) the right to

warn". The Collector should need no other powers. His chairmanship of the District Development Council keeps him not only in the centre of the development programmes but also enables him to secure dispassionate consideration of programmes of development. Public opinion at the present stage welcomes his chairmanship of the District Development Council as he is able to ensure a non-political, non-partisan approach to the larger programmes of the development of the district. One cannot, of course, visualise what the future will bring forth and the continuance of a permanent official as the Chairman of the District Development Council may not always be acceptable to public opinion. In administration, as in politics, heresies of today may become orthodoxies of tomorrow, and what is considered revolutionary or impracticable now may become practicable sometime hence. But whether he is a chairman or only a member of the council, the Collector as a trained professional civil servant will even in the democratic set up with devolution of powers and functions of the Panchayat Unions find an important part to play and will exercise his influence for good, not so much through the formal powers which have been given to him under the Acts, but in a friendly and informal way through this close and continuous association with elected representatives for the common cause of development. A journalist while writing about the role of the Secretary-General of the United Nations spoke of him as being rather a 'father-confessor' to the member nations—a role which enabled him to hear in an informal and intimate way their difficulties and points of view and which helped him in promoting better understanding between nations. In the present context of conditions at village and block levels, the Collector has not a dissimilar role to play. Personal and party considerations do still come in even in the discharge of their routine responsibilities by the democratic organizations, and it is here that the Collector as well as his officers, whose neutrality, detachment and bona-fides are taken for granted, can play a significant part in adjusting points of view, in settling differences and harmonising conflicting interests for the common tasks of development. This task is no less absorbing, no less important in the present crucial stage of development of democracy in the country than what he had to do as the local agent of an imperial power during the British regime. The



Collector's role today calls for the same crusading spirit, the sense of mission and participation which moved the administrators of the early British rule in building a great empire rather than the negative, hesitant attitudes which characterised the latter-day administrators preoccupied

with preserving an existing order in the face of mounting opposition to it. The only difference is that we are building not an empire but a commonwealth—an Indian commonwealth of which the Panchayats and Panchayat Unions will be such vital living parts.



# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN MYSORE

By

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The Institution of the District Officer dates back to many centuries but it would be adequate for the present purpose if we briefly examine the role of the Collector in the district administration immediately prior to Independence as compared to the present time and consider how it is likely to be reoriented in the next few years.

In the provinces of British India as well as in the larger Indian States the most important territorial unit of administration was the district. Of the head of the district (Collector or Deputy Commissioner as he was styled) it was said "he is the representative of Government in the large area under his charge; in the eyes of the people he embodies the power of the State or "Sarkar" and it is to him that they primarily look to redress their grievances and to promote their welfare". All the departments of Government at the Provincial headquarters had their counterparts at the district headquarters. These officers worked as a team with the Collector as their captain to ensure that the purposes of administration were fully served at the local level. The administration of those days was called a police administration. Maintenance of law and order was the primary function of the state and the collection of revenue was its second and equally important function. Welfare measures were not unknown. But they were limited in scope and received very little support from public funds. It was only after the introduction of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that development activities assumed a certain measure of prominence in British India. In this respect some of the advanced Indian States were much ahead of the Provinces. The welfare programme of the State was naturally reflected

in the nature of the district administration and the role played in it by the District Officers.

But apart from the welfare programmes of Government it was always open to a Collector with initiative and imagination to organise schemes of local improvement or public utility by enlisting the support of local communities and their leaders. His official prestige and influence could go a long way towards the achievement of such schemes. One hears of District Officers who got miles and miles of highways planted with road-side trees or hundreds of minor tanks repaired without spending public funds for the purpose. But these were cases of sporadic benevolence largely based on the personal factor.

It was not as if the Collector and other influential members of his team who tried to do such good work for the people did not keep in touch with public opinion. On the other hand it was through their close contact with the people and their leaders that they were able to mobilise voluntary or philanthropic effort for works of public utility. For inducing people to carry out such works, a little official pressure might sometimes be applied or some minor concessions not strictly permissible under the rules might be given. But so long as the intention was bonafide and the work was useful to the public, no one made a fuss about such minor irregularities.

In times of stress or difficulty like floods or famine the Collectors and their staff were never slow in coming to the aid of the people. The land owning class always claimed the sympathy of Government.

Even before India gained Independence the situation gradually underwent a change. During

the Second World War on account of the acute scarcity of essential commodities like food and clothing controls had to be imposed and the district administration had to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that everyone got his due share of whatever was available. As the War progressed and as its end was in sight the question of what the future should be began to agitate the minds of those responsible for the administration of the country. This led to the drafting of the post-war reconstruction plans and the district administration was called upon to play its part, however small or insignificant though it be, in framing these plans.

With the advent of Independence the philosophy of planned economy and planned development gained momentum and the district administration had to play its part initially in making available the material on which the plans had to be based and subsequently in implementing the plans.

In the light of the experience gained during the first two plan periods, it was felt that it was appropriate that planning should be from the bottom. Action was initiated about two years ago to see that necessary material was obtained from the village level upwards and the block plans and the district plans and so on were drawn up so as to make necessary material available for drawing up the State plan. The drafting of these block and district plans which naturally had to be within the framework of the State plan required on the one hand collection of material and on the other a close association on the part of the district administration with the leaders of public thought and opinion.

While planning was one aspect of the district administration, the Panchayati Raj which came into being a little over a year ago brought in its wake several problems which were not contemplated in the olden times. Until Panchayati Raj took a concrete shape and the District Development Councils were established, the district administration was oriented to implementing the policies and decisions of Government. With the introduction of Community Development in the year 1951 coordination was established between the non-officials and the officials at the district level. Panchayati Raj has placed this relationship on a closer and firmer footing. While even formerly the officers concerned with the district administration

were associating the leaders of public opinion with them in matters of importance affecting their interests it was open to the officers to take such decisions as they considered were suitable and appropriate to each occasion. The change in the set up necessitated the district administration having to adjust itself to a situation in which its decisions had also to be conditioned by public opinion. This was a change which made the task of the District Officer easier in some ways though harder in some others. He was relieved considerably of his responsibility for the content and the method i.e., as to what should be done or how it should be done. Planning on a national level naturally meant both these being laid down from the top. Responsibility for deciding individual schemes was shifted largely to the popular bodies which came into being. The large-scale spending programmes of the State and the set programmes of work that were laid down also made adequate provision for the finances required for executing these works. Resources were thus no longer a problem. It was only the responsibility for execution that rested with the District Officers.

The district administration of today has many facets all of which are equally important. The maintenance of law and order continues to hold the pre-eminent position. Collection of revenue is as important as it ever was; but while these duties which were formerly almost the only obligatory duties of district administration continue to be as important as ever, equal importance is now attached to social welfare activities. The Collector has been relieved of a mass of magisterial work in States where the separation of executive and judicial functions has been fully implemented. But even then his pre-occupation with the maintenance of law and order has not ceased. On the other hand, the tendency of people to resort to mass agitation and violence to promote their favourite causes or to secure redressal of their grievances, real or imaginary or to register their protests against the policies or decisions of higher authorities impose a heavy strain on the Collector who still remains the chief guardian of peace in his district.

At the same time the increase in the volume of legislation on a larger variety of subjects and the frequency with which it is amended means a corresponding increase in litigation with which the Collector is called upon to deal as the

original or appellate authority. I estimate that at least three days in the week have to be devoted to this kind of work. The good old days when the district head of the revenue administration and his colleagues could tour in a leisurely manner attending to all the minute details of administration are fast becoming a legend of the past. Social welfare activities are now becoming more and more important and the district administration has to meet the challenge in the form of increased quantum of work in this direction. But increase in work is not the only problem. The more difficult problem which a District Officer has to face today in discharging this responsibility is one of personal relations—vertical viz., his subordinates and the people for whose benefit he undertakes the several welfare activities and horizontal viz., the popular body which he serves and the co-ordinate officers of other departments. It was hardly necessary for the administrator of by-gone days to interest himself in trying to find out as to what people thought of the local administration and its activities. He had full discretion to do what he liked within his own sphere of activities and so long as the principles of good government were observed he would not be asked to account for any of his bonafide actions. Today, however, the district administrator has to make a happy compromise of the policies laid down by the higher authorities and of the trend of local public opinion. He could otherwise hardly make a success of his career. Even if the district administrator thinks that a particular project is good for the people, it cannot be implemented unless the district administrator is able to convince the beneficiaries about the real utility and benefit of the scheme. If in this process for reasons of their own the local leaders do not see eye to eye with the district administrator, the project, however good it may be in itself, cannot, more often than not, be implemented. Likewise a project which the district administrator considers to be none too good may have to be implemented if there is enough popular support for this and if people are vocal about it.

There were days when the subordinate officers in the district administration looked up to the District Officers for improvement in their prospects and their claims could be based only on their efficiency, honesty and hard work. This was for two obvious reasons, the first being

that no outside interference was ever tolerated in regard to these matters at the district level or elsewhere and the second was that administration was essentially impersonal. Today however, most of the officials have got into the habit of trying to improve their prospects not by their own merit but by doing what they consider would be acceptable to the local leaders in the expectation that such local leaders would advocate their cause and see that whatever they have been aspiring for is secured. Even in regard to punishments there are difficulties in the way of the District Officers dealing with the subordinate officers in the manner in which they honestly believe that they should. There is a general feeling that there has been a fall—and a very marked fall at that—in the standards of efficiency in the district administration. This appears to be partly due to our system of recruitment and training but one cannot overlook the fact that the District Officer has been reduced to a state in which he cannot with any degree of confidence feel that even in relatively small matters he has got the final say.

There is a school of thought which feels that in the present context of developments officialdom which laid so much store by the exercise of authority from time immemorial and which finds it hard to reconcile itself to a situation in which it is being deprived of such power should orient itself to the changed times. The people who are advocates of this school of thought feel that the District Officers should now take on the role not so much of an administrator in the sense in which one is apt to understand the term normally but of an adviser to a body of public leaders who are in immediate charge of administration. What they feel is that a time has come when the routine administration of the district should be in the hands of the elected representatives of the people in the same manner and to the same extent to which the administration of a State is now in the hands of the representatives of the people, that the District Officer should advise this body on technical matters as to how a thing should be done, take orders from this body and implement such orders to the best of his ability. I feel that in advocating this particular cause, one is liable to forget the actualities and to be swayed by the considerations of expediency or misapplied political analogies. One should not forget that at the level of the State or at the level of the Centre the choice is so wide that barring a few exceptions

we can get the men of very high calibre to take on the responsibility of administration. In smaller units like the district, the Taluk or the block it would be very difficult to get such men and even if they were forthcoming, they would generally be powerless when influential interests are ranged against them. In the present state of development of our nation democracy at the local level is hardly developed. There is one more aspect of the matter which requires serious thought. The principle of democracy is that the will of the people should be expressed by legislative action by the representatives of the people and the will of the legislature should be enforced by the executive. It is more or less the policy that is to be laid down by elected leaders and that policy is to be implemented by the permanent services. If one agrees with this theory, it would follow that smaller the unit of administration the harder it becomes for those invested with the responsibilities of laying down policies to strictly limit their activities to policy making. Influences are bound to work in a small local area and though the intention of the policy-makers may be honest, they would find themselves in a position in which they cannot but enter into the sphere of the activities of the permanent services. Essentially there is no harm in its being done since the elected representatives particularly in a small unit like a Taluk Board would have intimate personal knowledge of the requirements of their constituencies and would be well-equipped to deal with such problems. The difficulty, however, which I anticipate is that human nature being what it is, it is difficult for such an individual to resist pressures from the group blocks which are potent in the rural areas and to deal justly with one and all irrespective of their political or party affiliations. In this respect the permanent services are in a better position to ensure firm and impartial administration. For one thing they would have no affiliation with the local people and for another they would have no need of support from the local people to keep them in the place which they are occupying. They would afford to take an objective view of the problems that are posed before them and to take a decision which would probably be more correct and more honest than a decision that could be taken by a person or a body of persons who have inevitably to depend on the support of the local people, however, honest their own intentions may be.

In this view I feel that the District Officer

has much more responsibility to shoulder today than he had before. On the one hand he has to make an objective assessment of the situation and advise the body of elected representatives whom he has to serve. On the other he has to implement their decisions even if he is personally not convinced of the correctness of such decisions but in doing so he has to see that the principles of good government and the requirements of justice are not unduly compromised.

The District Collector is today held responsible for the actions not only of his subordinates and himself but also for all the activities of all the departments that function at the district level. He is expected to show results not by exercising direct authority over his colleagues of other departments but by influencing them by his personality. It is generally felt that co-ordination at the district level has not been understood properly by many a District Officer. There are two extreme views in regard to what coordination connotes. One set of people consider that the Collector should be entrusted with the power of giving directions to his colleagues of other departments in order to ensure that the policies laid down for their guidance are implemented. The other extreme view is that of people who consider that even today in spite of the responsibilities that have been thrust on him, the Collector should primarily be the chief revenue officer of the district and that coordination should be only in helping his colleagues in overcoming difficulties that they might have in executing any piece of work which devolves on them as part of the general district plan. I would not like to subscribe wholly to either of these views. I believe that the district administration could be a success only by having a compromise of these two views. Normally, the District Collector should be left to attend to his own duties but at the same time his position should be clearly defined so as to permit him to use his personal influence with the District Officers on the one hand and the higher authorities on the other and see that the several problems of the departments are solved satisfactorily; but one cannot deny that there are certain schemes or policies requiring more than one department to cooperate with one another in securing the desired results. May be on account of personal angularities of certain officers and may be on account of some defects in the system it may not be possible to have officers of more than one department to co-ordi-



nate their activities. It would then be for the District Collector to put pressure on them and to see that results are secured. It would strengthen the hands of the District Officers if they knew that the District Collector has the authority, however rarely it may be used to impose his will on them and that action taken under his orders would not be questioned by any higher authority.

The next point which I feel deserves consideration is the one about the extent to which the District Officers are equipped both by training and by the facilities placed at their disposal to adapt themselves to the changing conditions so as to enable them to play an effective part in the situation that is now obtaining. Most of the officers have had their initial training in the old set-up. They have, no doubt, gradually accustomed themselves to the changed environment and have now been able to play their part fairly effectively with reference to the duties and responsibilities that have been cast on them in the altered circumstances; but it would be good if specific courses of training could be arranged to enable them to understand the needs of the changing times. The orientation training centres that have already been set up are serving this purpose to some extent but it would take a long time before all the District Officers could undergo these courses of training. Then, again, there is need for having periodical refresher courses for officers who have already had initial training as the requirements of the changing set up are such that one cannot keep pace with them unless such periodical training is arranged for. These two aspects require examination and suitable action.

The question of the part to be played by the District Officers has been considered so far; but intimately connected with this question is the question of how the non-officials who are associated with the administration should be given training to adapt themselves to a situation in which they have got to take responsibility for what they say and what they do and in which the primary responsibility for ensuring that justice is done and for administering important community affairs in an efficient, just and constitutional manner is squarely placed on them. Even here a beginning has been made by having orientation training courses for the non-official leaders holding authority at the village and taluk level. This training combined with experience would pro-

bably cure the defects which one notices now. We have undertaken an experiment on a very big scale, an experiment in which we have inevitably to repose trust and confidence in the hands of the people some of whom are not yet fit for accepting this responsibility; but the tide cannot be turned on this account; we have got to go forward on the path which we have chosen and are treading. More and more responsibility will devolve on these local authorities and as more and more responsibilities devolve on them the role of the District officers becomes difficult and more important.

A time may come when a District Officer may not have any responsibility directly in the administration. The pattern under the Mysore Village Panchayat and Local Boards Act of 1959 is to have the 3 tier system as elsewhere in the country but with this one important modification that executive authority vests only in the bodies at the village and taluk levels; the body at the district level being of an advisory nature. The District Collector is the chairman of the District Development Council or Zilla Parishad but since that body itself is not vested with any executive powers all that it could do would be to advise the Taluk Boards as to how they could regulate their functions and as to how they could run the administration in their taluks. Statutorily some functions have been vested in the Taluk Boards. By executive instructions some of the plan schemes have also been entrusted for execution to them; possibly with the passage of time they will be expected to take on more and more items of developmental activities. They would also have the requisite funds at their disposal either by raising the amount by way of taxation or in the form of grants which they might receive from the State. Though they have not got adequate staff to implement all the plans independently of the departments of Government, even this deficiency may be supplied in course of time. We are looking forward to a day when the Taluka Development Boards would be self-contained bodies both for planning and for execution of the plan for the welfare of the people; but the District Development Council would then only be a body of advisers with the Collector as its chairman. A time may, however, come when the collector would cease to be even the chairman but would be associated with the District Development Council purely as an adviser. His authority having



dwindled or almost disappeared, the District Officer does not enjoy the same prestige which he once did. While he could once do many things without his actions being questioned so long as they were done bona fide in the interests of administration and of the people, he no longer enjoys such a privilege. The role that he played formerly was of an administrator, pure and simple. To-day, however, he must develop his personality and stature as a person who is capable of tendering honest, impartial and objective advice on matters of public importance. He would have to develop qualities of leadership which he perhaps did not require before. It would not do if he is a diehard of the olden days with the might of the Empire behind him. There are some diehards among the District Officers and I am afraid that very soon they will have no place. While the Dis-

trict Officer would continue to function as an agent of Government he would also have to become the leader of the people but the prestige which he enjoys should not be such as to come into conflict with the position which is the legitimate right of the local non-officials. The District Officer would, therefore, have to develop qualities which would secure this special position for him and avoid such conflicts. It would, however, be a satisfying task for the District Officer to do what is good for the people, to know that he enjoys their confidence and at the same time to honour the will of the people. It is a hard role to play but the only role that could be assigned to the District Officer in future. It is not perhaps a spectacular role but any person who seeks to work in the true spirit of public service should not only be content but proud to fill it.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN ORISSA

By

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## **Position of the Collector during the British period of Indian History**

A broad historical analysis will show that under the British rule in India up till 1858 the administrative machinery was meant to govern British India without any consultation with, and co-operation of, the people. After 1858 the Executive remained entirely responsible to the British Parliament. In governing the country the British Indian Administration tried occasionally to acquaint itself with public feelings with a view to making its machinery effective. In its very nature the system of administration was a benevolent despotism tempered by the public opinion and the interests of a remote democracy in England, occasionally influenced by whatever public opinion was then existing in India. It will not be untrue to say that until 1919 the Executive in India remained supreme and independent both of the Legislature and of the public. The Montford Report says: "The announcement of August 20, 1917, marks the end of one epoch, and the beginning of a new one. Hitherto we (Englishmen) have ruled India by a system of absolute Government, but have given her people an increasing share in the administration of the country and increasing opportunities of influencing and criticising the Government." Even though the introduction of responsible Government in the Provinces, which began under the Act of 1919, was completed under the Act of 1935, still the Executive Government remained for all practical purposes supreme at the centre till the attainment of Indian Independence in 1947. In such a set-up the District Administration constituted the main pillar of British Indian Government. The Collector was the centrepiece of the district unit. He was the

symbol of Governmental authority in mofussil areas. He functioned as a representative of "His Majesty's Government". He constituted the eyes and ears of the Provincial Government. He was the link between the Government and the people. He was not only the head of the major department of the Government, namely the Revenue Department, but he was also expected to superintend the affairs of the other departments in the district when exigencies of district administration called for it. His role was intensely personal and in the district he was more or less a despot. Most of the people in the countryside could not get anything done except through him. In times of distress like flood, famine, or pestilence, the people turned to him for assistance. To the rich he was a refuge; to the poor he was the protector. No local man, however eminent or influential, could challenge his authority. The Provincial Government thought several times before they went against his recommendations. In nine cases out of ten they made it a point to secure his concurrence before they put through any scheme. He was the man on the spot and the Government of those days listened with respect to the man on the spot. They scrupulously avoided doing anything which would detract from his official status or authority. In those days, the district was a place where policy ended and action began. It was field work as opposed to desk work. The administrative machinery of the district came close to the mass of the people. The man in the street appraised the efficiency of the Government from the way in which the district machinery operated. Warren Hastings laid the foundation of a stable administration and Lord Cornwallis built it with a sound footing with the Collector, District Judge and Superintendent of Police as the

main actors on the district stage. Lord Cornwallis was not slow to realise that a sound district administration was the only way of creating a favourable impression in the minds of the people and strengthening the foundations of the British Government in India. Successive administrators from his time onwards took care to see that the district administration was maintained at the highest pitch of efficiency. This state of affairs continued with variations now and then until the advent of Independence.

### **Position of the Collector since Independence**

One of the many changes brought about in India after the attainment of Independence in 1947 is that the Collector has lost his pre-eminent position in the district hierarchy. He is no longer *primus inter pares*. M.L.As. and members of the ruling political party have stolen the initiative from the district officer. In rural areas at present it is the politician that counts more than the district officer, for the politician occupies a position of vantage-today. He has direct access to the powers that be and can get things done over the head of the Collector. It is also possible for him to show his influence to a Collector who chooses to cross his path. His control over his subordinates has become weak and over other departments has proved ineffective. Against this general background I propose to examine the different functions of the Collector today in Orissa in the succeeding paragraphs indicating the working in practice of those functions and putting forward suggestions for change, wherever necessary.

The principal unit of Revenue administration is the district which is placed in charge of a Collector, who is the chief Revenue Officer of the district. He is responsible for seeing that (a) Government revenue, cess and other dues are collected and credited into the treasury in time, (b) Land revenue records are maintained accurately and up-to-date, so that citizens know exactly what their rights are in respect of the land they own or possess, (c) all revenue cases in which citizens' rights to possess or own land are in dispute such as mutation, encroachment, waste land lease, land acquisition, etc. are disposed of quickly and impartially, (d) that all Government property in his district is well cared for, and (e) in normal agricultural distress and in emergencies like flood, drought, scarcity,

outbreak of epidemic and pestilence, people's difficulties are quickly and effectively solved. The Collector's functions in the Revenue administration are subject to the general control and supervision of the Commissioner and the overall supervision of the Board of Revenue as defined in the Orissa Revenue Divisional Commissioners Act, 1957 and the Board of Revenue Act, 1957. In the performance of his work connected with land revenue administration in the district the Collector is assisted by one or more Additional District Magistrates and a number of executive as well as supervisory revenue officers at the district headquarters, in the Sub-divisions in each District and in the Taluks or Tehsils, which are the lowest revenue units in a district manned by responsible gazetted or non-gazetted officers known as Tehsildars or Taluk Officers.

Although the system of land revenue administration existing at present in Orissa can be said to be functioning satisfactorily on the whole, yet the problem of delays in the disposal of revenue cases and matters crop up from time to time which require the constant vigilance of the Collector. Sometimes inordinate delays are found to have been occurring in the disposal of revenue cases. Such delays are partially inherent in the system of appeals and revisions provided for under the rules and laws and in the procedure prescribed for disposal of such cases. In most of the cases where unusual delays have been found to occur the causes are either lack of sufficient alertness on the part of the officer, or his far too much dependence on office which sometimes misleads or the officer's ignorance of the correct rules and laws that are to be applied in particular cases, which is primarily responsible for his taking delayed decisions. These causes can be successfully removed by a vigilant Collector by means of regular and purposeful inspections of the various revenue branches under his charge and by holding regular monthly meetings of revenue officers where delays made in the disposal of revenue cases and the difficulties experienced by the revenue officers in disposal of such cases are frankly and thoroughly discussed by the Collector with his revenue subordinates.

Separation of the judiciary has materialised in 9 out of the 13 districts of the State. In the districts in which separation of the judiciary has not taken place the District Magistrate still administratively controls the magistrates

concerned with the trial of criminal cases. In the 9 districts where separation of the judiciary has taken place the District Magistrate still continues to control the criminal administration of the district so far as it relates to the administration of the preventive sections of the Criminal Procedure Code. In all the districts, however, the District Magistrate controls the law and order and the police administration through the Superintendent of Police and the hierarchy of Police officers functioning under the Superintendent. This work of the District Magistrate is being done efficiently on the whole. The complicated nature of some of the offences that are now occurring in the State, particularly in the industrial areas, requires careful and comprehensive investigation and prosecution by the police, in the absence of which some important cases are likely to end in acquittals in the courts. It may be useful for the District Magistrates to devote some time to this matter and bring to bear their mature experience upon the investigation and prosecution of such offences.

The Collector is in charge of development administration of the district in its various ramifications and has been given necessary agencies at the Block level to implement the various developmental schemes. In the Welfare State that has been envisaged for India the increasing burden of responsibilities of carrying through and implementing the various measures impinging on the welfare of the citizens in the rural and urban areas has fallen on the district administration which stands closest to the people. The Collector, as the head of this administration, is expected to deliver the goods. A large number of developmental measures initiated in the rural areas, like Minor Irrigation Schemes, Tribal and Rural Welfare Schemes, Educational Schemes, etc. have succeeded. Some of these well-intentioned measures of Government have in some areas fallen flat or have produced inadequate results not commensurate with the amount of public money spent. In some such cases the required public co-operation has not been forthcoming primarily because the Development or Extension Officers concerned have not been able to enthuse the people of the area in regard to the implementation of the schemes, and partly because there have occurred administrative bottlenecks on account of too much departmentalism leading to avoidable delays and waste of time. In such matters

the Collectors are required to establish effective contacts with the people of the rural areas, so as to evoke the requisite amount of public co-operation for the implementation of the schemes, and also to remove the administrative bottlenecks that may be occurring in the working of the various departments at the district level. The importance of the Collector's role in co-ordinating the activities of all departments engaged in the implementation of developmental measures in the district on the one hand and of securing the necessary public co-operation for the success of these schemes on the other cannot be over-emphasized.

Recently the three-tier system of Panchayat Raj has been introduced in Orissa under the Orissa Gram Panchayats Act, 1948, as subsequently amended, and the Orissa Zilla Parishad Act of 1959. At the village level there is the village panchayat headed by an elected Sarpanch. The administrative unit is a big village or a group of contiguous small villages. The Panchayat functions through Village Committees and performs a number of obligatory and discretionary functions prescribed in the Act. The Panches are elected by adult voters ward-wise. At the Block level there is the Panchayat Samiti with an elected Chairman. Every block shall have a Samiti. There are at present 307 Panchayat Samitis throughout the State of Orissa. Each Panchayat Samiti is an executive body entrusted with the task of execution of development works of all kinds in each Block Development area. The members of the Samiti elect from among themselves their Chairman and Vice-Chairman. The Block Development Officer is the chief Executive Officer of the Panchayat Samiti. The members of the Panchayat Samiti are (a) the Sarpanches of the Gram Panchayats of that area, (b) three persons to be elected including a lady and a member of the scheduled tribe or caste, who are not members of the Gram Panchayat, (c) the Block Development Officer, and (d) the departmental officers to be nominated by Government. At the district level there is the Zilla Parishad with an elected Chairman. The Zilla Parishad consists of the following members:

- (a) Members of the House of the People whose constituency forms part of the district and such members of the Council of States as Government may by order specify,



- (b) All members of the State Legislature whose constituency forms part of the district,
- (c) The Collector of the district and other district officers of Medical, Education, Public Health, Agriculture, Veterinary, Gram Panchayat, Forests, Welfare Works, Co-operative and such of the departments as may be prescribed by rules,
- (d) Sub-divisional Officers exercising their jurisdiction within the district,
- (e) Chairman of each of the Panchayat Samitis in the district, and
- (f) A woman member to be elected, if the non-official members of the Parishad do not include a woman.

There is one Parishad for every district. One of the Chairmen of the Panchayat Samitis is elected as Chairman of the Zilla Parishad. A senior officer of the rank of Additional District Magistrate has been appointed as the Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad is a co-ordinating, supervising and advisory body, examining and approving budgets of Panchayat Samitis and consolidating their plans and programmes. It serves as a link between the Panchayat Samiti and the Gram Panchayats on the one hand and the State Government on the other. The Panchayat Samiti in its turn controls the budgets of the Gram Panchayats under its jurisdiction and through Standing Committees performs the following functions in the Block:

- (a) Execution of development works,
- (b) Management, control and spread of primary education,
- (c) Management of such Trusts and Endowments and other institutions as may be entrusted to them under orders of Government, and
- (d) Supervision of vaccination and registration of births and deaths.

The District Magistrate exercises general powers of inspection, supervision and control over the performance of the administrative duties of the Gram Panchayats. The District Magistrate has also been vested with certain emergency powers to be exercised in case of neglect of duties or abuse of powers by the Gram Panchayats. The Collector has the powers of

inspection and supervision of (a) offices of the Panchayat Samitis and the Zilla Parishad; (b) the institutions under the control of the Zilla Parishad and the Panchayat Samitis; and (c) the execution of developmental works under the control of the Zilla Parishad or the Panchayat Samitis.

Besides being a member of the Zilla Parishad, the Collector is the Chairman of the Administrative Co-ordination Committee of the Zilla Parishad consisting of all the developmental officers working at the district level who are members of the Zilla Parishad. While the functions of the Collector with regard to the Gram Panchayats and the Panchayat Samitis are supervisory with a view to ensuring the performance of duties of these bodies in accordance with the relevant Acts, his functions with regard to the Zilla Parishad are more close and direct in as much as he is a member of the Zilla Parishad, besides being the supervisory authority thereof. Although the Gram Panchayats have been functioning in this State for about a decade, the Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads have just started functioning. It is too early to comment on the functioning of these bodies. The Collector is expected to play the role of a "friend, philosopher and guide" to these local bodies in the initial stages of their development and these bodies in their turn are expected to take full advantage of the mature experience of the Collectors in successfully performing the tasks assigned to them under the relevant Acts.

In the changed set-up of administration it is essential for Collectors to keep in view and act up to the following general principles:

(a) Administration is a human activity by human beings and for human beings. This aspect is often forgotten by administrators. The human aspect has to be remembered in maintaining close relationship by officers with their staff. Under bureaucracy, the officer thought that he was superior to his subordinate and that to keep intimate touch with them was something below his dignity. This was all right then. But in a welfare state, the officer and his subordinates are partners in the same enterprise and this partnership presupposes that there should be closer relationship between the officer and his staff.

(b) An administrative structure has three elements, namely, (a) those at the top who lay



down the policies; (b) those at the bottom who carry out the policies; and (c) in between come those in the middle whose work is mainly supervision. Good supervision needs a number of qualities. A good supervisor must know the technical know-how. He must have the ability to co-operate, to enthuse, and unite all those working under him. He must possess qualities of leadership. He should love, and be sincerely devoted to his job. He should set moral standards and good example to those below him.

(c) The equipment of a public servant is what counts in a welfare state. His knowledge of rules and procedures is only a matter of subsidiary importance. His outlook is important and this outlook is shaped by his equipment. Service organizations where they exist can do much in improving the outlook of public servants. In this country service organizations were hitherto concerned mainly with their rights. It is a happy sign that some of them have begun to realise their wider responsibilities in the matter. Service associations can play a vital role in promoting administrative efficiency.

(d) Co-ordination, hard work and vigilance are essential elements for the implementation and success of all administrative measures. With all these the Collector is vitally concerned. The main business of co-ordination is to reduce tensions and frictions in the day-to-day work and achieve healthy adjustments or workable compromises between conflicting points of view, interests and demands. It will not be correct to think that after the plan schemes have been transferred to Panchayat Samitis for execution, the responsibilities of the Collectors in regard to these schemes have ceased altogether. Really speaking in the changed circumstances Collectors have to be more vigilant and active in giving required guidance to these local bodies. At the same time they have to see and report whether the State plan is fully implemented or not.

(e) An officer's grit is known by the way he discharges his responsibilities. There are some officers who definitely shirk responsibility and do not venture to do anything without taking the advice or orders from their superior officers, lest the blame would fall on them squarely for taking the decision. They want to share the blame with others or cover their weakness by the orders of their boss if or when their action is called into question. This is sheer "escapism" from responsibilities and officers of that type can seldom aspire to rise. They should

remember that they can never acquire the qualities of leadership without taking responsibilities single-handed. Leadership requires drive, dynamism and fearlessness. Let there be no fear for mistakes, slips or irregularities. In fact, courage to commit mistakes will create fearlessness in mind and if or when a mistake is committed we should have the courage also to admit it and face the consequences. That will add to our moral strength. Disowning a mistake or a fault and laying the blame for it at the door of others is not only cowardice but also mental dishonesty and should be eschewed altogether. So, however important the status or position of an officer, he should discharge his responsibilities according to his abilities without shifting them to others.

(f) To be an efficient public servant a person must not only be good at his profession but should also be versed in the problems of public service, be loyal to both the Government and its institutions and be of the highest integrity and moral calibre. In short, the officer should have, first and foremost, the public interest at heart and should not be caught up in the narrow confines and petty intrigues of any one clique. The purposes of public service efficiency may be stated thus:

- (i) Improving of work processes,
- (ii) Simplifying services and cutting down their cost,
- (iii) Serving the public with the maximum of speed and courtesy,
- (iv) Eliminating superfluous departments and sections,
- (v) Co-ordination between different units and institutions,
- (vi) Eliminating duplication of work and overlapping of units. It may be remembered that efficiency is not a matter of mere theory but calls for a "large dose of goodwill and honest endeavour".

(g) The following observations of Shri Y. N. Sukthankar, Governor of Orissa, in his address to the Institute of Public Administration, Patna University, are worth recalling:

"An administrator who wants to do well must adhere rigidly to certain moral principles and the one with the highest priority should be integrity. Complete and absolute integrity in money matters is simply a "must". Accepting some sort of monetary or other

similar advantage can never be condemned in sufficiently severe terms. An officer must look upon his calling as something sacred and if he allows himself to be influenced in giving or arriving at a decision one way or the other as the result of monetary gratification or some gift, he has thoroughly disgraced himself. He may move about in society as if nothing has happened and pretending that he is a person sinned against rather than sinning. He must remember that a number of people get to know of these transactions, the word passes from mouth to mouth, and he can never really look another man straight in the face. But, apart from this integrity in monetary matters, even more important is mental integrity. He must not say or do anything which is contrary to his convictions arrived at after careful thinking and deep study of proposals which have come to him officially. In expressing his views he need not be rude or violent, but he can be firm, combining firmness with tact and sweetness. No matter what the consequences may be to him of having expressed his honest opinion regarding a proposal, he must stand by it. In whatever he does or says, an administrator must take care to see that his usefulness as an administrator is not impaired. This is the basis of the saying that it is not enough to do justice; you must be seen to do justice. If you put yourself in situations which create doubt about your honesty and impartiality, although you may really be honest and impartial, you have created an impression adverse to yourself in the minds of others and to that extent your usefulness is impaired. Some officers are inclined at times to misunderstand such a conduct as likely to affect adversely their popularity, and they try to be all things to all persons. This is not a

correct attitude. It is incumbent on an officer to observe a certain code of conduct, to cultivate a certain amount of aloofness without necessarily living in an ivory tower, and he must therefore shun contacts with people who are directly or indirectly connected with a case that he may be trying or investigating."

*(h) Quick Decision and Quick Action:* The Prime Minister of India recently called for quick decision and quick action in the implementation of Government plans and policies. The need for quickening the tempo of business in the field of public administration cannot be over-estimated. Delays have become all too frequent since Independence. The causes for delayed decisions generally fall into two categories. Firstly, delays may be due to the lack of experience and proper equipment on the part of officers who are to take decisions. Experienced officers with a mind fed by information acquired by constant study can decide a matter with ten times more quickness than others. Owing to the rapid expansion of Governmental activities since Independence it has become difficult to secure experienced people to fill positions in the higher rungs of the ladder. But what is to be regretted is that many of them do not exhibit an inclination to make up for the lack of experience by constant efforts at self-development. There are also cases in which officers fail to take quick decisions not because they lack experience or equipment but because they are afraid to tread on the corns of others. Politics have got mixed up with administration and civil servants often fear to take correct decisions lest they should offend their political superiors. They therefore take the line of least resistance and stave off the evil day as far as possible. A servile bureaucracy is a drag on a democratic administration.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN PUNJAB

By  
P. K. KATHPALIA  
*Deputy Commissioner*

Pouring new wine in old bottles is not, in the context of historical change, a novel activity (witness the evolution of the House of Commons), but when with this activity appears a simultaneous phenomenon of pouring old wine in new bottles, even experienced vinters may be excused a feeling of confusion, if not of alarm. And yet this dual process is exactly what is taking place in the country today with the transformation of the role of the District Officer and with the devolution of several responsibilities traditionally shouldered by him or his organization on the Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads.

To take—and shake—the old bottle first (it is remarkable how unbreakable it has proved despite all the rude shakings it has received in the recent past) we discover that it has much more wine in it than ever before but that that wine is not nearly as heady as it used to be. For there is this apparent paradox in the role of the Deputy Commissioner today that while his duties, responsibilities, and on paper, powers, have increased, his prestige has perceptibly declined. This sounds surprisingly self-contradictory, but is nevertheless true, and on a little analysis will appear to be neither surprising nor self-contradictory. The dynamics of democratic processes are such that the words and acts of the Deputy Commissioner today cannot be considered as the words and acts of a near omnipotent representative of a king reigning, almost as it were, by divine right. They are words and acts of an employee of a Government which has been set up by the people and which can be thrown out by the people, open and often subjected to criticism by different sections of society. At best, they are the words and acts of an employee

respected for his ability and integrity, as well as for the long and great tradition attaching to his office; at worst, they are words and acts to be ignored or countermanded by orders from above, which in this set-up have become disconcertingly easy to procure.

This partial dethronement, natural and inevitable in the circumstances, has been accompanied by an increase in the powers and functions of the District Officer which, on reflection, will appear to be not unnatural, if not inevitable. Government, following by and large socialist policies, has come to regard itself as the custodian of the interests of all classes, directly responsible for preventing any abuse of anybody by anybody. This has naturally resulted in a spate of enactments, ordinances, and orders, in which an increasing number of controls has been prescribed and in which Government has arrogated to itself increased powers of interference. These powers and self-imposed duties have an astonishing range varying, to name but a very few, from controlling the movement of foodgrains and essential supplies to fixing their price, from controlling the establishment of fruit nurseries to controlling the establishment of brick kilns, from assessing surplus lands of big landlords and doling it out to landless tenants to organising the marketing of agricultural and horticultural produce. Not all this authority can be exercised effectively from the State headquarters, and considerable delegation, mostly to the District Officer, therefore becomes a practical necessity. Apart from performing these formal functions entrusted to him by these enactments and orders, the Deputy Commissioner continues to be considered informally or semi-formally as the general custodian of his district and has not only to maintain liaison

with all departments, the number and size of which have expanded and are continually expanding, but has also in some form or other to exercise control over them and their officers. He has been given direct or indirect control over new departments, like the Community Development Department, of departments with a new emphasis, like Co-operative Department, and even over the older and well-established departments which have lately found themselves in heavy weather, like the Engineering Departments, where for some years now the intellectual and financial probity of a number of their officers has been questioned and a degree of reliance placed on the senior District Officer for reporting objectively on their officers and affairs. Once responsible, in general, for what is called "general administration" and, in particular, for revenue administration, the Deputy Commissioner is now also responsible in particular of the Community Development Programme and, in general of all development programmes at the district level. (The emphasis on his responsibility is even more pronounced in hilly districts.) Never before in its history, not even in the Second World War, has this office been saddled with so many tasks.

The decline in his prestige coupled with this increase in his powers and responsibilities has left the present picture a little confused. There is an undoubted tendency to rely more and more on the District Officer for executive and development work whatever the department concerned. The Deputy Commissioner is not merely generally competent to write to Government about the affairs of any department, but is also supposed to write the formal confidential reports of officers of different departments at the district level as far as their reputation for integrity, dealings with the public and interest in development work are concerned. And yet there is some hesitancy in taking the decisive step which would bring the argument to its logical conclusion. This step would be to merge all departments in the district with the Deputy Commissioner's organization. The Deputy Commissioner would then be the territorial head of administration in all its aspects directly responsible to Government for implementing its policies and schemes, departmental functionaries at the higher level acting solely as technical advisers. While the present movement does appear to be directed towards this end, the movement is halting and hesitating. There

is perhaps some reluctance on the part of the Government to bring about a completely radical change. In any streamlined administration, however (which ours is not but which it had better become), a middle course of this kind prescribing divided responsibility cannot be followed. This is, incidentally, emphatically true of another relationship in which there has been no change—the relationship of the District Magistrate with the police. Despite, or perhaps because of the provisions of the Police Act and the Police Rules, this relationship poses difficult and ticklish problems in those administrations in which the District Superintendent of Police has not been placed under the District Magistrate. It is needless to add that the argument in favour of placing other officers directly under the control of the Deputy Commissioner applies even more forcefully to the district head of the Police Department.

While above I have discussed the tendency towards making the Deputy Commissioner a complete overall territorial head of the entire governmental administration in a district, acting as the sole link between the Secretariat and any Department in the field, I think that there is at the same time a real possibility of a completely reverse tendency asserting itself. The Deputy Commissioner has been and continues to be necessary in his present role as the representative of the government in the district, functioning as its eyes, ears and tongue because even with the present improved state of communications such a representative is indispensable. Indeed, where communications are bad and, therefore, governmental control is remote, as in hilly areas, the Deputy Commissioner even today enjoys far more powers and prestige than at other places where communications are speedier and governmental control consequently stronger. It is perfectly possible, however, that the rapid technological advance that we are making with the consequent shrinkage of distances may render the institution of the Deputy Commissioner, as understood at present, unnecessary, there being easier mutual access between the departments in the field and the Secretariat with no necessity of any intermediary. That the cabinet and the Secretariat at present have to rely on the District Officer is merely an admission of the fact that executive matters requiring spot decisions cannot be decided at the State headquarters for that would take much time and botheration. It is, how-



ever, possible to envisage a time in the future when with much speedier means of communications than are available at present, distances in terms of time would be reduced to such an extent that a good bit of the role at present played by the Deputy Commissioner *vis-a-vis* different departments would be played by the Secretariat itself. With a completely separated judiciary, a Superintendent of Police, given the powers of a District Magistrate, and a Zila Parishad to look after development and possibly even general executive work, the District Officer may one day be reduced to a mere specialist in matters concerning land. Indeed, even matters concerning land may be taken out of the purview of the Deputy Commissioner, for it is certainly arguable that the present system of land administration is outmoded and needs to be scrapped and replaced by a more logical and more democratic system governed by the normal processes of registration and civil law and liberated from the present clutches of the revenue machinery. It is also arguable that land revenue as such should be abolished and the agriculturist taxed like other citizens of the country. Such a change if it comes about—and it can come about—will affect an administrative revolution.

I almost forgot here to mention what these days is taken practically for granted, namely, the shift in emphasis from the revenue functions of the District Officer to his development and executive functions. Once revenue work mattered most to the Deputy Commissioner whose performance was judged by his knowledge of revenue matters and who, therefore, assiduously devoted himself to acquiring as intimate a knowledge of these as possible. With the present tumultuous activity all over, be it concerned with promoting development activity or controlling agitations or coping with the V.I.P. menace or merely establishing good public relations, the revenue functions of a Deputy Commissioner have unfortunately been relegated to an unimportant position even though they give him the basis of much of his prestige and power. Pursued, indeed haunted, by so many other tasks, which, whether important or not, need or are ordered to be given immediate and personal attention, the District Officer no longer has the time to devote himself to revenue work and to acquaint himself thoroughly with it as his forebears used to do. Indeed, the same could be said of his superiors all along the line.

Alacrity in disposal today is of greater importance than the quality of work done. With the diminishing importance of revenue functions has come about a superficiality in the District Officer's acquaintance with his territory. The horse has been completely and inevitably replaced by the jeep, partly because there are more roads now, largely because the luxury of an ambling journey can no longer be afforded.

The maintenance of good public relations has assumed an importance that is not justified on merits. Today, through sheer success at maintaining good relations with different sections of the public, whatever their genuine worth or importance, a District Officer can get away without doing any real constructive work. While public relations are an important aspect of a District Officer's work, they can be given excessive importance in a society before which the main task is not to appease a frustrated few but to raise standards of living and of behaviour.

This brings me to another noticeable change in the District Officer which is the sapping and wresting of his initiative. A combination of circumstances is responsible for this. There is our system of planning which is done at the top. There is the direct and indiscriminate access that government gives to the people, particularly the more influential among them. A direct result of this is the tendency of the public to bypass officers at the district and divisional levels and go straight to the State headquarters with their suggestions and their grievances. Encouraged by Government, this tendency saps the initiative of the field officer who finds that a large part of his functions has now become the transmission of reports. The well-meaning encouragement given by Government to the public to bring forward complaints of all kinds has proved useful in many instances, but has not been an unmixed blessing. Among the various committees for the co-ordination of various activities, in which the Deputy Commissioner sits, is a committee of officers of his district and of office-bearers of the ruling party which is called at regular intervals to discuss all kinds of complaints received from anyone by any officer of the district. These meetings are presided over by Ministers. While in some cases these meetings do prod some slothful officers to act expeditiously, they also lower the morale of officers who begin to devise devious ways and



means to prevent complaints from being brought to notice in these meetings. In these meetings it also becomes the ticklish role of the Deputy Commissioner to act as a cushion between the accusers and the accused. We have fortunately not yet reached a situation in which the majority of officers prefer like ostriches to bury their heads in sand instead of standing their ground firmly. A pity, for today one of the necessary functions of an officer is to stand his ground firmly and one of the principal tasks today of the Deputy Commissioner is to instil confidence among officers of different departments by showing them how to stand their ground firmly without offending constitutional propriety. This is easier said than done, and I confess, there are some among us who uneasily, or worse, easily make indefensible compromises. I use the qualifying expression "indefensible" advisedly for the story of administration in the recent past has been, and in the immediate future will be, a story of compromise and it has been and will be the function of a Deputy Commissioner, as of other higher civil servants, to effect compromise with skill and with regard to principles of justice and fair play.

Talking of initiative, I cannot help mentioning, a little sadly, that the Community Development Programme could have given to the District Officer and his organisation a great and rare opportunity of exercising his talents and initiative for constructive work if he had not been made to conform to a hidebound programme in which disproportionate expenditure on establishment and unnecessary expenditure on several unimportant items of work has resulted in a waste of enormous sums of money. With a more imaginative and more elastic structure much more than has been done could have been done with this money.

In such a short paper many things necessarily have to be omitted. Of these, however, the introduction of what is popularly called the

"Panchayati Raj" cannot be one. In the Punjab the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads have been elected very recently and the Zila Parishads are to be effective from the next year. Just at the moment their introduction would appear to add one more unpredictable element to the general administrative picture, and yet it is the introduction of this very element that may lead to a real and more lasting clarification. With the conquest of distance and the consequent ability of government to look after its own interests from the State headquarters, the District Officer may either be reduced to an officer dealing compartmentally with land problems or may disappear altogether leaving the vacuum to be filled by the administrators thrown up by the villages, or maybe the new institutions will not take root and the men running them because of lack of training, experience, education and perhaps goodwill, will make a mess of things, and thus spell their own disaster. If Panchayati Raj becomes a success and the concept driven to its logical end there should be no reason for the continuance of an institution like that of the Deputy Commissioner. If, on the other hand, the Panchayati Raj fails and the men running it prove inadequate to the task, it is quite likely that the Deputy Commissioner will as a reaction from this experiment emerge as a stabler and considerably more powerful figure than he is now or perhaps has been before. This chain of reasoning of course postulates decisiveness at the top and its willingness to abandon half-measures and to give Panchayati Raj the completest scope, or to give the Deputy Commissioner, in the event of its failure, complete, real and uninhibited powers. The present measures taken do not go far enough. Whatever agency is called upon to handle the task of administration must, without hesitation, be given faith and trust, and, therefore, full delegation and any compromise on this basic principle will perpetuate a system in which morale, speed and efficiency are rarely to be found.

# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN RAJASTHAN

By  
T. N. CHATURVEDI  
*Collector and District Magistrate*

The changing role of the District Officer, popularly known as Collector and District Magistrate (or Deputy Commissioner) makes a fascinating reading in the administrative annals of the country. The role of the District Officer in Rajasthan, however, has to be understood in a slightly different context of a new State—both in constitutional as well as in administrative sense. Rajasthan was formed by the integration of a number of princely States which had varying standards of public administration and public officials. Except Ajmer, which merged into Rajasthan only in November, 1956, no other integrating unit had the District Officer, who could be compared with his counterpart in other States in the country in respect of traditional prestige, authority and influence. In princely States it was the ruler who was the source of power as well the cynosure of all eyes. Moreover, even if a particular functionary was called the Collector, District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner, he had hardly the powers in law which were enjoyed by the officer of the same rank in the then British India. Against the concept of “Ma-baap” in relation to the District Officer in the British India was pitted the concept and reality of “Annadata” (bread-giver) in the ruling states and principalities. Even as regards influence, he scarcely wielded the same visible and potent influence. This was inherent in feudal society. The ruler along with his Jagirdars and others belonging to his clan, really constituted the ruling group—“the governing class”. Any officer, however able or exalted, was considered a “chaker” (employee or servant). In this social setting, naturally, the officer even if designated as Deputy Commissioner or Collector, could neither assume influence nor exercise authority associated normally with this office. Thus, the institution of the Collector is,

to all intents and purposes, a new one in Rajasthan.

After the State of Rajasthan came into existence, according to all-India pattern districts were specified and 25 officers posted as Collectors. There was neither any uniformity of office procedure, nor of laws in the different districts. There were no manuals, rules or regulations. The relationship of the Collector with other officers in the district was neither specified nor understood. He was considered just as one of the many district level officers entrusted with a specific task of revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. Even as regards the latter, he was deemed to be an appendage of the Superintendent of Police. Besides, in the process of administrative unification, all the authority was centred in the Secretariat; the powers delegated to him were very small and limited. Practically, for everything, he had to make a reference either to the Commissioner or to the Secretariat. All power rested in the Secretariat and co-ordination, if any, also existed at that level. There was also another initial handicap in the recognition of the position of the Collector in as much as the officers designated as such did not have the adequate service status till the extension of the scheme of an All India Service.

As soon as the administration in the State began to stabilize, laws were passed and rules and regulations framed, the office of the Collector by the very logic of circumstances began to come into prominence. His importance as a key functionary and as a unifying factor of the various branches of the administration in the district which was extremely nebulous to start with assumed clarity. This needed a clearer understanding of his relations with other dis-

trict level officers. There was naturally a good deal of subtle friction and tussle in the beginning. Hence a number of circulars were issued by the State Government drawing attention to the role of the Collector in the district. In 1953, a Collectors' Conference was called at Jaipur, which was addressed by the then Chief Minister. In the Conference the concept of the primacy of the Collector was referred to, the difficulties which the Collectors faced in the district in their work and in relation to other functionaries were discussed and Government issued directives to ensure administrative harmony and smoothness at the district level. Since 1953, the Conference has been held every year. It is now called the Senior Administrative Officers' Conference and is attended by all the Heads of Departments and Secretaries to Government. In the second Conference in December-1954, the Chief Minister, Shri Mohan Lal Sukhadia, again stressed the importance of the role of the Collector as well as his primacy in the district as follows:

"I mean to make it absolutely clear that the Collector is the focal point of the administration in the district. He represents the Government in the last resort. It is not possible for the administration to function effectively or achieve co-ordination at the district level unless his authority is felt by officers and I want him to function as the first among equals."

The Chief Secretary, who followed him, observed :

"That the Collector should be the first officer in the district is not for the purpose of gratifying his sense of power, but for assisting the Government in coordinating the activities of the different departments functioning in the district."

These annual conferences have helped to strengthen the position of the Collector in the administrative set-up.

When the pivotal position of the Collector was not recognised even in respect of the conventional administrative structure, there was hardly any place for him in respect of the newly started developmental work. In the initial stages of the opening of the Community Development Blocks and National Extension Service Blocks, the Collectors were hardly in the picture. The general impression was that a new department had been added to the Secre-

tariat with Director of Development as its head and the Block Officers and the Project Executive Officers were to work under his overall guidance. As the number of Blocks increased and the work gathered momentum, the need for co-ordination arose, since it was difficult for every Block Development Officer or Project Executive Officer to approach the State Government or the Heads of Departments, like Buildings and Roads, Irrigation, Agriculture, Industries, Co-operation, and so on. It was at this stage that the Government decided to set up the District Development Committee consisting of officials and non-officials with the Collector as the Chairman. Besides, the Government issued an important circular emphasising the importance of the Collector as the Captain of the team in the development work and asking the Collectors to call every month a meeting of the district level officers, wherein all problems and difficulties faced by any department in the district or any matter of public importance referred to by the Government, could be thrashed out. The Heads of Departments were enjoined by the Government to see that the concerned district level officer attended these district level meetings punctually and regularly. This also helped to institutionalise the vague ideas of primacy of the Collector and the desire of and need for co-ordination in development work. The main purpose of co-ordination is to reduce tensions and frictions in the day-to-day work and achieve healthy adjustments or workable compromises between conflicting points of views, interests and demands. There is a wider angle to this problem of co-ordination not only among governmental organisations but between government and non-government agencies.

It will thus be seen that the position of the Collector in Rajasthan has to be viewed in the context of changed circumstances themselves. Firstly, it emerged into a clearer focus in the changed political structure. In the second place, the institution grew up when the State had started developing social and economic dimensions and was moving towards a Welfare State. Thirdly, the institution of the Collector in the district did not have to any significant degree the benefit of traditional influence, prestige or authority. This has certain advantages, especially as regards the psychological adjustments of the officers themselves to the changing social and political environment. Of course, there

was naturally the disadvantage of lack of established and well-recognised central authority in the district and other conventions. Even though practically a new institution the disadvantages that arise because of the association of ideas or the image which they project are, of course, there. In Rajasthan, the position that the Collector occupies today is not the result of any past heritage, but is a consequence of conscious and deliberate recognition of the fact that such an institution is essential and useful in view of the expanding development work as well as in the general administrative set-up. The district is the primary unit of administration in which the public comes into intimate contact with the administration and the development works become vital to the people and hence the officer, who is required to supervise and co-ordinate these tasks, was bound to acquire a position of influence, primacy and even authority. The Government is judged by how the administration functions at the district level.

As in other States in the country, the Collector in Rajasthan has manifold functions and capacities. They may be briefly and broadly categorised as follows:

A. *As Collector*, he is :

1. responsible for proper management of Government lands,
2. responsible for recovery and collection of land revenue, cesses and other government dues,
3. charged with the administration of Revenue laws,
4. responsible for preparation, maintenance and collection of land-records as well as the collection of many kinds of agricultural statistics,
5. responsible for the administration of estates placed under the management of the Court of Wards or under the direct management of the Government,
6. responsible for grant of loans to agriculturists for agriculture and improvement of land,
7. responsible for the follow-up of the work of the land reforms,
8. responsible for administration of Stamp laws,
9. responsible for land acquisition and requisition work,

10. responsible for relief measures in times of famine, fire, floods, cattle migration due to scarcity of fodder and other natural calamities.

B. *As District Magistrate*, he is:

1. head of the criminal administration in the district and controls the police and jails,
2. responsible for granting licences of arms and other things, like explosives, petroleum, cinemas, etc.,
3. responsible for grant of passport, extension of visas and control on foreigners,
4. responsible for the maintenance of law and order and proper administration of criminal laws in the district,
5. responsible for election work in the district,
6. to appoint panel of lawyers in consultation with the District Judge,
7. to issue domicile certificates, certificates for scheduled castes or backward Classes and political sufferers, etc.

C. *As District Officer*, he is:

1. the principal agency of Government in the matter of general administration in the district—looks after the interests of the Government in general,
2. responsible for proper implementation of Government orders,
3. to control and supervise litigation on behalf of the Government, initiated by the Government or brought against the Government by any private party,
4. in general charge of the Treasury as laid down in the Treasury Rules,
5. responsible for overall co-ordination of important activities of Government Departments having offices or officers in the district,
6. to train junior officers in official procedures, administrative work as well as in personal conduct and behaviour,
7. to ensure that public grievances against the administration in the district are properly and effectively dealt with,
8. the *ex-officio* Chairman of the Urban Improvement Trust (except Jaipur),



9. charged with certain regulatory and recommendatory functions in respect of Municipal Boards and Councils,
10. responsible for allotment and distribution of controlled or essential commodities and supplies.

D. *As District Development Officer, he is:*

1. charged with supervision of all developmental schemes in the district and to serve as chief co-ordinating authority on behalf of the Government,
2. responsible for the successful working of the schemes of democratic decentralisation in Panchayati Raj, and
3. to act as the public relations officer on behalf of the State Government to maintain close touch with the people by meeting them at headquarters and during tours.

As a matter of fact, daily laws are enacted which vest some authority in or saddle the Collector and District Magistrate with new functions and duties.

The aforesaid classification is only illustrative and not a complete or exhaustive catalogue of his multifarious duties and functions. It is not proposed to discuss at any length the functions of the Collector in his capacity as the principal revenue officer since they are well-understood and are fairly known all over the country. With the multiplication of an increase in types of loans, grants-in-aid, etc. by the Government for various purposes the collection of public dues and moneys are having added importance. As regards Rajasthan, one special factor has to be taken notice of in as much as only recently the various enactments and regulations have been codified casting a special responsibility on the Collectors to see that they have been implemented and are properly being worked. Moreover, the State of Rajasthan has adopted comprehensive land reforms and their implementation in the field both in letter as well as in spirit is another additional responsibility. The Government has all along been very keen that in the new State the revenue functions are not neglected. Though most of the districts have been provided with an Additional Collector, the Government have issued orders that a particular number of cases every month must be decided by the Collector himself. If there is any default in

this respect, the concerned Collector may get remarks from the Chairman, Board of Revenue, 'Inadequate disposal'. Moreover, it has also been enjoined on the Collector that while he can leave the inspections of the courts of Assistant Collectors to the Additional Collector, he must inspect every year the offices and courts of the Sub-divisional Officers and all the Tehsils in the district. Thus it will be seen that in Rajasthan every effort is being made to see that the duties of the District Officer as Collector are not relegated into the background. Though as an administrator, his functions are of a comprehensive and general nature he is expected to be a specialist in this field.

The role of the Collector as District Magistrate is of paramount importance. Law and order is the basis of any organised society but is also the pre-condition of socio-economic development. Except in a few smaller districts, the District Magistrate does not do much criminal case work. He exercises only a general supervision over the criminal administration in the district. In Rajasthan, there has been a beginning towards the separation of judiciary from the executive and in some districts Munsiff-Magistrates have been appointed, who are directly under the control of the High Court. Rajasthan being a new State and a border State, and lacking the benefit of the impact of strong centralised authority in the past, the problems of law and order are extremely important and the District Magistrate's role in this respect cannot be over-emphasised. The District Magistrate can perform these duties adequately if he has psychological assurance that he will have due support from those in seats of authority in times of crisis. The responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security is shouldered by him along with his colleague, viz., the Superintendent of Police. The association of these two officers has to be very deep, intimate and that of perfect mutual confidence for smooth running of administration in the district. It may be added that the District Magistrate in Rajasthan must inspect at least half of the Police Station in his district (the other half to be inspected by the Additional District Magistrate) and Station House Officers are to be transferred only in consultation with the District Magistrate. The character roll of the Superintendent of Police in Rajasthan is initiated by the District Magistrate. Every officer has been particularly



required to inform and consult the District Magistrate about any issue or matter relating to his department if it is likely to lead to any public agitation or furore. He submits every year the report on criminal administration in the district.

As District Officer, the Collector has multifarious and varied duties. They are usually referred to as "Executive Functions". They may vary from the protocol duties of receiving the dignitaries to the overall supervision of the working of the administration in the district. The Collector is the agent and representative of the State Government in his area. He is the visible authority to whom the people approach even if in the present set-up of things the Ministers and politicians are accessible. People come to him with all sorts of grievances, complaints, suggestions and proposals. He is expected to send numerous ad hoc reports to the Government and very often replies to queries of Union Government and other agencies or organisations. As an agent of the State Government he is expected to maintain close and cordial relations with the Military authorities and other officers and of the Union Government. He is intimately connected with the working of Employment Exchanges. He is required to associate himself with many functions and organisations in order to smoothen matters by pooling of resources. Statutorily and by delegated authority, the Collector exercises important powers in respect of municipalities, both in normal times and in an emergency. He not only hears appeals in certain cases, but can call for record, inspect a municipality, suspend the execution of a resolution of the Board and even positively provide for execution of any work in certain circumstances. At times, he has been required to take over even as administrator of certain bigger municipal councils.

The duties of the Collector as District Officer are very wide. Any type of work which cannot properly be defined and assigned to any technical department is entrusted to the Collector. There are all sorts of district level officers, some of a higher rank and status as the Principal Medical and Health Officer, Executive Engineer, Irrigation and Buildings and Roads, etc. while others, though called the district level officers, do not compare favourably in terms of prestige, authority or emoluments. Both categories of officers have sometimes difficulties, which can

be tackled by the unity of approach and sufficiency of resources which only the Collector can bring to bear upon a problem. Moreover, there are problems which relate to one or more departments in the district and these are also harmonised and smoothened by the good offices of the Collector if he is inclined to take interest. He becomes very often the accelerator, mediator and co-ordinator between different officers and offices. In a developing State dedicated to the welfare of the people, many new offices and institutions are springing up. Many officers, who have no direct contacts either with their Heads of Departments or with the Secretariat, request the Collector to help them in small matters like sanctions of some additional staff, repairs of buildings or similar other things which make their functions more effective. The Collector is in a position to approach the Government as well as the Heads of Departments and with his authority, influence and contacts, can get things done much more promptly. In Rajasthan, the Government has charged the Collector with the responsibility to ensure increasing representation of scheduled caste and tribes in the ministerial and class IV services recruited in various offices at the district level. The link of the Collector with other officers in his district is not only through the formal district level officers' meeting. The contact to be effective has to be very often more informal, but continuous, sustained and mutually assuring through personal discussions and consultations. All this involves immense strain on time and energy, but if the Collector wants to lend significance and meaning to his capacity as District Officer and if he wants to have prestige too—the decline of which is much lamented today—he has to pay at times a heavy price for his position of primacy and leadership, since only formal investiture of powers does not ensure co-ordination.

This aspect of the Collector's work as District Development Officer has only been recently recognised. This has been the direct consequence of the introduction of Community Development programme and other planning schemes in Rajasthan as in other parts of the country. Periodical as well as ad hoc progress reports are asked from the Collector about development works in the district. It is for him to co-ordinate the developmental work and initiate action to remove difficulties and bottlenecks that stand in the path of developmental

work. In Rajasthan the Collector had become through compulsion of circumstances an integral part of the work of the Community Development programme in the district even before the so-called scheme of democratic decentralisation appeared on the scene. In the Senior Administrative Officers' Conference at Abu in May, 1958, the Chief Minister referring to the Collector's role in this respect observed : "In the present set-up of increasing developmental work he is expected to guide and co-ordinate welfare activities in his district. The changing circumstances have added a new dimension to his duties and authority which ought to be fully understood and recognised in order to enable the administration to function as an integrated whole in the public eye." During the same Conference, the Chief Secretary said : "The district has been and will continue to be the pivot of the structure of administration. It is an agency of change towards a new social order and it must respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. The Collector's role has undergone a change and his responsibility has increased. This responsibility will further increase.... The Collector's position and potential role, therefore, will be of pivotal importance for many years to come." The democratic decentralisation has given a new orientation and meaning to the functions of the Collector in this respect which will be discussed in detail later on.

Before a reference is made to the role of the Collector in respect of the scheme of democratic decentralisation, it will be worthwhile to make a reference to a very recent development in the administrative pattern in this State which has a direct bearing on the role of the Collector. This development has been the abolition of the institution of the Divisional Commissioners in Rajasthan. This has been rather a very bold step for a State whose administration has attained stability only in the recent past. It is not my purpose here to go into the merits of this question. In Rajasthan, the Commissioner was not only the Revenue authority, but he was also the programme adviser for the Community Development in his Division as well as the co-ordinating authority at the Divisional level between the Divisional Officers and the Collectors. The Collectors could seek guidance from him or he could himself give them advice and even directions in the interest of public work. The Commis-

sioner would often call a meeting of the Collectors of his Division and discuss with them the revenue and criminal case work as well as the progress of developmental schemes and other miscellaneous affairs in his area. If there was any difficulty, he could take it up at his own level with senior officers of the concerned department or with the Secretariat and the Board of Revenue. However, the Government decided that in the interest of economy as well as the expeditious disposal of work, the posts and offices of the Divisional Commissioners should be abolished. For purely revenue work of a judicial nature a Revenue Appellate Authority has taken their place. The abolition of Divisional Commissioners has considerably increased the work of the Collectors. Many miscellaneous functions and duties discharged by the Commissioners in Rajasthan have now been entrusted to the Collectors. This has apparently added an element of prestige and authority also to his office, for he is now the chief and direct representative and symbol of governmental authority.

It is yet too early to say, but some people have expressed misgivings that there may be difficulties in co-ordination and the Collector's job may be made more difficult so far as the relations with Divisional Officers or Heads of Departments are concerned since the support and good offices of the Divisional Commissioners will be wanting. Government has, however, taken ample precautionary steps in this direction, though only mechanical devices cannot work and officers at all levels have to understand and appreciate the fact of common partnership in the administration since co-ordination does not necessarily mean subordination. The Heads of Departments and Divisional Officers visiting the district have been particularly advised to meet the Collector during their visits and discuss with him the problems of any particular department. This will not only establish greater personal contacts, but will help to enhance the influence of the Collector in the eyes of all the subordinate officers working in the district. The Collector will be in a position to appreciate the viewpoint of the department concerned, while the Head of the Department will also be able to know the problems relating to his department slightly from a detached angle but from an officer who is directly in touch with the people. But this cannot be a one-way process. The Collectors

have also been advised to meet as and when possible the various Heads of Departments during their visits to headquarters and develop closer relations and understanding. There cannot be any hard and fast rules on this subject. This can only be determined by personal understanding of mutual problems and cultivation of an integrated approach to administration. The Government has also decided that the Development Commissioner will more frequently in groups as well as collectively meet and discuss the pace of development work and difficulties, if any. Moreover, the Chief Secretary will also twice a year summon meetings of Collectors to probe into their difficulties, to understand their viewpoint and to determine ways and means which might help to streamline and smoothen the functioning of the administration as a composite whole at the district level. The Collector has been asked to send half-yearly reports to the Government (in the Cabinet Secretariat) regarding the working of all departments located in the district. He has the assistance of the district statistician for such purposes. All this will help to bridge the hiatus created in the administrative pattern as it had developed so far. In Rajasthan, the District Officer very often finds place in various committees on various subjects appointed by the Government. The membership is not simply confined to people in the Secretariat and to non-officials. He thus not only gains in experience and perspective but also in stature. Thus the District Officer by his contribution does become directly or indirectly a source of policy formation.

The State Government has, however, further seen to it that the position of the Collector is strengthened and clarified with a view to achieving common administrative purposes in the district. The Government in the Cabinet Secretariat issued a very important circular on August 12, 1961, defining the role of the Collector and his relationship with officers of other departments as it became necessary to do so with the introduction of Panchayati Raj as well as the abolition of the posts of the Divisional Commissioners. It has been laid down that the District Officer's control over developmental and welfare activities in the district will generally conform to the pattern of the District Magistrate's control over the Police. It has also been laid down that the Collectors will be mainly responsible for ensuring:

- (1) that the time-table for various schemes is adhered to and targets achieved in time.
- (2) that effective steps to eliminate and control corruption are taken.
- (3) that there is proper co-ordination and difficulties in implementation of various schemes are removed.

The district heads of all development and welfare departments have been asked to remain in close touch with the District Officer and seek his guidance and assistance and on his part the District Officer should take interest and help them in every way. In order to ensure that the time-table for various schemes is adhered to, the Collectors should be consulted before the finalisation of important schemes and copies of all Government sanctions of Heads of Departments are to be sent to the District Officers. The circular also enumerates the district level officers in the district and the list is all-comprehensive.

The District Officer has been given some administrative and disciplinary control in respect of the Development Officers in the district, e.g. regarding the tour programmes, sanction of leave and monthly progress reports. The District Officer has been given a very effective power regarding transfer of an officer of a particular department working in the district either within the district or away from the district. If the Head of the Department does not agree to the request of the Collector, he will submit the matter to the Government with his views. Moreover, the Collector is not only the initiating authority in case of confidential reports of many district level officers like District Statistician, Assistant Engineer (C.D.), Public Relations Officer, District Industries Officer, but he also gives his remarks and impressions about other senior officers like the Inspector of Schools, District Animal Husbandry Officer, Principal Medical and Health Officer, Assistant Registrar Co-operative Societies, Executive Engineer, Buildings, Roads and Irrigation, etc. There are many other important directives which go to strengthen the functional effectiveness of the Collector. This circular also suggests as to how the meetings of the district level officers referred to before can be made more purposeful. It is advised that these meetings should be held at least once in three months, if not more frequently. It will be interesting to note the sub-

jects which are generally to be discussed at these meetings:

- (a) Progress made relating to various plan schemes and projects;
- (b) Matters relating to local bodies at the district, block and village levels;
- (c) Difficulties experienced by different Government Departments in relation to each other;
- (d) Important programmes to be launched in the district;
- (e) Land acquisition matters;
- (f) Arrangement of supplies, specially in relation to agricultural commodities;
- (g) Utilisation of irrigation potential;
- (h) Small savings;
- (i) Important directives of the State Government.

The minutes of the meetings are kept and the suggestions and recommendations are followed up and effort is made to implement them expeditiously and effectively. Thus these meetings are helpful not only in highlighting the role of the Collector in developmental activities, but also in the general administrative set-up and help to eliminate much of routine and delay in important matters which are of immediate importance to people and otherwise give rise to public dissatisfaction. This provides a forum to the officers concerned to express their difficulties and make suggestions which are considered and action as may be considered necessary, is immediately taken. Though the State Government is doing its best to specify the proper role and status of the Collector, this will always be largely a matter of personal equation, personal competence, personal attitudes and methods of working of the District Officer himself. The human factor in administration cannot be institutionalised.

The reasons for the setting up of the *Balwant-rai Mehta Committee* and the recommendations and proposals made by it are too well known to require any repetition. The Rajasthan Government was one of the first States in the country to implement with suitable modifications and adjustments what has come to be popularly known as the scheme of 'Democratic Decentralisation of Panchayati Raj'. A full-fledged scheme was worked out and adopted in all the twenty-six districts in the State simultaneously.

The Scheme in Rajasthan envisages a three-tier set-up, namely, the Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and the Zila Parishads. As regards the district and Block, in Rajasthan the Government in its wisdom came to the conclusion that the block or Panchayat Samiti was the administratively and economically viable unit and hence the devolution of authority could best be made at that level. It also felt convinced that enough local leadership would be available in the area to run the Panchayat Samitis smoothly and shoulder the responsibilities. The Panchayats are the primary and basic units under the scheme and they are the agencies for execution and implementation of developmental programmes at the Panchayat level. The Panchayats have been made co-terminus with the smaller units of revenue administration, namely, Patwar Circles. Each Panchayat consists of a village or a group of villages with a population between 1,500 to 2,000 people. The Panchayats are for execution of developmental works, while separate Nyaya Panchayats have been constituted to discharge judicial functions. The Chairman of the Panchayat is called the Sarpanch and is selected by the entire electorate of the Panchayat. The functions of the Panchayat are administrative, municipal and developmental. The Act also makes provision for holding at least two meetings of the Gram Sabha, namely, the entire electorate of the Panchayat Circle. This aims to involve the entire people in the developmental processes and helps to diffuse plan consciousness.

Upon the Panchayat Samitis have devolved the responsibilities for the administration and execution of development work within its area. The head of the Panchayat Samiti is called the "Pradhan". The Panchayat Samiti consists of all Sarpanches in the Block and there is provision to give adequate representation to women, scheduled castes and tribes and co-operatives, etc. The term of the Panchayat Samiti is three years. The M.L.As. and M.Ps. are the associate members of the Panchayat Samitis. The Government has enjoined on all district level officers to attend the monthly meetings of the Panchayat Samitis, guide them in their work and extend to them needed technical assistance. The Panchayat Samitis are also empowered to summon a district level officer to its meeting by a previous notice in writing. There is statutory specification of the finances and revenues of these bodies. For



proper functioning, there is provision for standing committees for various purposes. The Panchayat Samiti formulates its own plans for development works and submits its budget to the District Development Officer, who presents it to the Zila Parishad, the latter either passes the budget as such or suggests modifications which it is not legally obligatory on the Panchayat Samitis to accept. In actual practice, the Panchayat Samitis do accept the suggestions as they are by and large intended to improve the working or to give proper procedural form to their proposals. The Vikas Adhikari is the Chief Executive Officer of the Panchayat Samitis. The Pradhan sends his remarks about the work of the Vikas Adhikari to the District Development Officer for incorporation in the Confidential Report. The Panchayat Samiti is the agency responsible for the "area planning". At the district level the new statutory body is called the "Zila Parishad". It has replaced the District Board as well as the District Development Committee. All Pradhans of Panchayat Samitis, M.L.As., M.Ps., President of the Central Co-operative Bank and the Collector of the district are the *ex-officio* members of the Zila Parishad. There is provision for co-operation of women and Scheduled Castes, if not earlier represented. The Zila Parishad elects its own chairman called the Pramukh. Every Zila Parishad has a secretary on deputation from the State Government. Earlier the Secretary of the Zila Parishad worked as Assistant to the Collector for Development and Panchayats also. But with the experience gained and increase in the quantum of work, these two offices have been separated. The Zila Parishad, as such, has no executive functions as that would have made Zila Parishad the replica of the defunct District Board. It is largely a supervisory, advisory and co-ordinating body. It helps the maintenance of liaison between the State Government on the one hand and Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis on the other. It advises the State Government on all matters relating to the implementation within the district of the various schemes under the Plan. It is a body which is growing in moral authority and its views are listened to with respect by all functionaries in the district and by the Government.

This is in brief the Scheme of Democratic Decentralisation in Rajasthan. In order to ensure proper standards of recruitment and pro-

motion, the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Services Selection Commission has been established. The District Establishment Committee with the Chairman or member of the Services Commission as Chairman and the Pramukh of the Zila Parishad and the Collector is responsible for postings and transfers of the officials of Panchayat Samitis within the district. It is not worthwhile to go into the details, for our purpose here is only to assess the role of the Collector in relation to the Panchayati Raj, namely, in respect of these three institutions. Quite a few study teams and non-official observers have paid a tribute to the harmonious relations between officials and elected representatives at all levels in the working of the scheme. There was a sustained and continuous attempt made for the psychological conditioning and adjustment of the officers to the changed situation through seminars and meetings. The Chief Minister in his addresses and speeches in the meetings and seminars of officers has made it repeatedly clear that it was a considered decision of the Government and a question of faith, not an experimental measure, and it was the duty of officers in the district under the leadership of the Collector to make the institutions grow and flourish. It was a case of people coming into their own and there was no question of derogation of the dignity of the Collector or other officers if they were administratively and psychologically prepared to respond to the changing realities of the political spectrum. There was, however, a good deal of loose talk and vague fears and misgivings in certain quarters. The actual working and experience of two years have belied the apprehensions of these prophets of doom. At the level of the Government, all care was taken to lend a sense of proportion and keep the issue in its proper perspective. Before the implementation of the scheme, the Chief Secretary wrote: "The Collector's role is important though delicate. As Collector he will be the representative and it will be his responsibility to see that these institutions grow in a healthy manner, receiving the support and allegiance of all Government officers, and that their activities are properly co-ordinated, while as the District Development Officer, he will have to see that the Plans for the district are properly drawn up conforming to the broad framework of the State Plan and that the decisions of the Zila Parishad are properly implemented."



It hardly needs mention that elections to the Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis are basically the duties of the Collector. The Rajasthan Panchayat Act as well as the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, gives many statutory and delegated powers to the Collector. These powers are to be exercised with a view to checking improprieties and illegalities that may occur. They are in the nature of built-in correctives in the scheme. The Collector is also vested with powers to get a work done or duty discharged if the Panchayats or the Panchayat Samitis and even the Zila Parishad fail to do so. The Collector is also responsible for the compilation of the annual Administration Report of the Panchayats and the Panchayat Samitis. He is required to send quarterly reports to the Government about the working of the local institutions—their progress and achievements as well as their difficulties and drawbacks. If there is possibility of a breach of the peace, or there is anything flagrantly illegal or against public interest, order and morality the Collector is empowered to suspend the concerned resolution of the Panchayat as well as Panchayat Samiti. The Collector has the powers of due entry and inspection of the property records, works in progress as well as the office of the Panchayat or Panchayat Samiti. The Government particularly expects the Collector to keep an eye on the interests of the weaker sections in society and see that they get a fair deal as regards benefits flowing from developmental expenditure. In reality there is adequate authority vested in the Collector to prevent abuse of authority by the Panchayats or the Panchayat Samitis. It has not been by and large necessary to exercise these powers except in very rare cases, but the existence of such authority in the background serves as a deterrent and a corrective. It is, however, important for him to exercise requisite vigilance in this respect for these institutions are much too close to people and lapses if not rectified are likely to undermine people's faith in the intrinsic worth of the scheme. The Collector attends and the Government has prescribed that he should attend as many meetings as possible of the Panchayat Samitis and guide them. He is expected to carry out every year a detailed inspection of the Panchayat Samitis to assess their working and progress. It will be worthwhile to quote sections 59 and 69 of the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad Act, 1959, to give a concrete idea of the power and

functions of the District Officer in the pattern of democratic decentralisation. Sections 59 and 69 read as follows:

*"59. Powers of District Development Officer.—*The District Development Officer shall have power—

(a) to examine the extent of progress achieved in the execution of various schemes and the implementation of the decisions and resolutions of the Zila Parishad and to make suggestions for improvements, if any;

(b) to co-ordinate the work of various Development Departments of the State Government at the district level;

(c) to examine that the amounts placed at the disposal of the Panchayat Samiti are being properly utilised for the purposes for which they are earmarked, that the minimum standards of service are maintained in institutions run by Panchayat Samitis in the district and that the Vikas Adhikari and his team are fully playing their role as extension staff;

(d) to make a report to the Zila Parishad regarding all matters embodied in clauses (a) and (c), and

(e) to perform such other functions and to discharge such other duties as are imposed on him by or under this Act or as may be delegated to him under section 84."

*"69. Duties and powers of Collector.—*In addition to the powers conferred on him by any provision of this Act, the Collector shall have power—

(a) to ensure that technical assistance is made available to Extension Officers by the connected departments of the State Government;

(b) to see that adequate precautions are taken and sufficient provisions are made for the recovery and repayment of loans advanced by the State Government to Panchayat Samitis;

(c) to see that Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis are provided with necessary assistance in the early recovery of their dues whether as tax or on account of loans; and

(d) to watch and report to the State Government as to whether priorities fixed in the plans are being adhered to and the general pattern of work is in conformity with the policies laid down by the State Government or by the Central Government."

The presence of the Collector not only helps to guide these institutions and enlighten people present on many subjects, but also removes many of their difficulties and apprehensions. This also helps to create confidence in the administration. After all, there were persons and institutions through whom in the earlier days the Collector used to assess public feelings and reactions. These institutions, Pradhans, Sarpanches, Panches, and members provide now the new agency for the same purpose. The Collector, if he takes interest in these bodies, is in a position to get things done the way the Government likes and the way they ought to be done. The conduct and attitude of the Collector determines the tone and trend of all officers towards these bodies. Thus he can exercise a healthy influence in stabilising this experiment in broadbased democracy. It also facilitates the establishment of proper relationship between the revenue administration at lower levels and other branches of administration on the one hand and the Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis on the other, which sometimes are otherwise made to appear by certain elements as conflicting categories. In Rajasthan the scheme of democratic decentralisation has not, however, materially reduced the work of the Collector in relation to the original community development programme. It has only given it a different direction and in some ways has increased his responsibilities.

The main impact on the position of the Collector comes in regard to his relationship with the Zila Parishad and its Chairman, called the "Pramukh". The Collector is the non-voting member of the Zila Parishad. This is in the fitness of things as otherwise he might get himself involved in disputed decisions, which might mar his effectiveness in many other fields. The Collector as the District Development Officer is under the Act asked to report about the progress of the development works in the district. They consist not only of the Community Development programme, but other developmental schemes that are being carried out in the district. Though the Collector is not the Chairman of the Zila Parishad, yet his voice is heard there with respect and he has his own contribution to make. His presence and membership are functionally useful to the Zila Parishad. They also help him in his work of general administration as well as in his appreciation of the problems and administrative

realities within his jurisdiction. In the first place, the Collector is in a position to judge the reactions and feelings of the people. The Zila Parishad is almost like a sounding board to him. In the second place, it gives him an opportunity to explain the viewpoint of the Government about a particular matter and it helps to quell misinformed public criticism. In the third place, the Collector is in a position to explain the viewpoint of the technical officers to the representatives of the public. This becomes at times quite delicate. Technical officers have their own standards of technical excellence, while the popular representatives complain of a negative attitude, complacency and dilatory action. It very often falls to the lot of a Collector to find the common language with which to reconcile requirements of technical propriety and pressure of popular aspirations and demands. Again, the Collector works as a spokesman of all departments in the district and becomes the shock-absorber or cushion between the district level officers and the elected representatives. Before the public he at the same time assumes responsibility to get the needed thing done or to have the grievance redressed. In the next place, in the Zila Parishad the Collector almost acts like a public relations officer and can create goodwill for the administration in general and thus promote developmental work. Again, very often when there is unresolved argument or conflict of views among elected members, the disinterested judgment of the Collector becomes a determining factor. Lastly, the Collector is an officer possessing adequate experience, information, objectivity and influence, which are always of help to the Zila Parishad in the discussion of the various matters before it.

The question arises of the relationship between the Pramukh of the Zila Parishad and the Collector. Largely, this is a matter of personal equation. But there is no cause for disharmony and conflict. If the Pramukh, Zila Parishad and members think that there are certain functions which are exclusively the concern of the Collector and District Magistrate and similarly the Collector on his side remembers that it is in his interest to have good relations with the head of the elected body in the district as he can then have greater public co-operation in his own work, there is no reason for antagonism and friction. The close and correct relations between the Collector and the Pramukh

of the Zila Parishad facilitate the development work and promote better understanding between all branches of administration. If the spirit of mutual understanding prevails among them, they can help to smoothen and harmonise relations at all levels (say, Pradhan and Vikas Adhikari) between officials and non-officials with a view to promoting common goals. Everybody under a constitutional government is responsible and there is no reason for the District Officer to be touchy if he is required to explain any situation or requested by elected representatives to look into some matter of public importance. In a democratic and welfare administration, new relationships are inevitable and new traditions and conventions will consequently develop.

In Rajasthan there is scope for the District Officer to have the satisfaction of doing pioneering work. In many parts of the State, settlement, consolidation and colonisation operations are going on and though not directly in charge of this work, the Collector is intimately associated and concerned with these types of work.

Freedom has released dynamism in all walks of life. There is virtually a renaissance in the fields of arts, literature and music. There is increasing interest in sports and games. In Rajasthan we have Sahitya, Natya and Sangit and Lalitkala Akademies. We have also the State Sports Council. Actually, the Collector is the Chairman of the District Branch of the Sports Council. If a District Officer takes some interest in these social, literary and sports activities, he can do a lot of good and even gain greater confidence and goodwill. Such interest and participation help to dissolve feelings of separatism and suspicion between the people and the administrator and enhance the general effectiveness of the District Officer himself. All this is much more positive and purposeful than the lending of so-called dignity to these organisations and activities.

The work of the Collector is increasing in magnitude and complexity. It is, however, wrong to think that democratic decentralisation has detracted from its authority and power. What he has lost in authority can be gained by tact in the form of adequate influence. Democratic decentralisation is the historic imperative of a developing society, as no agency of the Government, however powerful and competent, can implement and supervise the expanding and developmental programmes. The task

before us is both to build up democratic institutions, deepen and broaden them and further organise the community for effective action in bringing about a new socio-economic order. The role of the Collector will always remain what he chooses to make it by his tact, drive, functional efficiency, imagination, social awareness and effort. It is at times an exacting job. But it is an exhilarating one. Some people have theoretically argued regarding the possibility of the fading away of the office of the Collector in times to come. This is like "the withering of the State" and even if it comes to pass there can be no greater satisfaction than the fact that an institution fades away or changes its theme when it has fulfilled its end. Someone has even argued that the Collector should be an elected one. This in itself is the recognition of the basic utility and soundness of the office of the Collector. However, these are only possibilities in the realms of theory or imagination, while the realities of the present circumstances are that the work of the Collector is expanding, his responsibilities are increasing and the work as well as responsibilities are also changing in their form, content and direction. This in itself speaks well of the dynamism of this institution.

At times it seems bewildering to an outsider as to how one can satisfactorily discharge such duties. But through proper delegation of powers to his subordinates and appreciation of priorities, the District Officer can meet the situation fairly satisfactorily. It will be interesting to know that in Rajasthan there is a beginning towards introduction of Organisation and Methods machinery in the districts. His load can certainly be lightened by flexibility in financial procedures and through nationalisation and reduction in number of statements, reports, etc., asked of him by the Government, Board of Revenue, and so on. The District Officer cannot ask simultaneously for reduction in his functions and duties and increase in his influence, dignity and authority. There is a good deal of talk regarding decline in the prestige of the District Officer. This is no doubt true if prestige is equated with domination and the conscious or unconscious desire to be somebody in particular. But if the District Officer trusts his colleagues in the District and extends them assistance and consideration, sometimes he is prepared to shoulder responsibility on their behalf, he is the recipient of all respect from

the official wing. Similarly, if the District Officer has by his conduct created an image of competence, sympathetic approach and impartiality in his dealings, he has the confidence, goodwill, co-operation and even gratitude of the people. In such a climate of confidence, the scope for the manoeuvrings of the so-called meddlesome and meddling politicians is considerably reduced, if not entirely eliminated. In the present context of things, the District Officer has to be dignified without being exclusive and aloof. He is himself committed today to the philosophy and ideology enshrined in the Constitution and for their realisation, he has to work in his own humble sphere so as to carry people with him, for administration in the district is not something sacrosanct or esoteric above and apart from the people.

In spite of all political pulls and administrative pressures, psychological strains and stresses, there is no cause to be depressed or downhearted. There is no answer to our problems, unless we create and recreate hope and zest in ourselves, faith and dedication to the role that changing circumstances determine for us. As a seasoned administrator Shri B. Mukherjee has pointed out, "I visualise that the Collector of the future will be a person who, because of his maturity, impartiality and objectivity, will always be able to guide and advise the democratic institutions and to whom their leaders will often turn for impartial objective advice. Such should be the prestige and position which a Collector should be able to build up for him-

self in the future. And he will remain the representative of the State Government, the guardian of law and authority and vested with adequate powers for effective action in an emergency in the interest of the people in general. Such a position should not appear unattractive to anyone, however ambitious he may be (*Kurukshetra*, 1959)." But this position will have to be well merited in the conditions of today. In Rajasthan, the District Officer has no patrimony of goodwill, influence and authority which he can draw upon. It will be his exciting though difficult task to work and earn the influence and status he thinks he is entitled to. It is pertinent to remember that it is at the level of the district that the concept of the Government becomes real and meaningful to the people. For the success as well as the good name of the Government the appreciation of the composite nature of the functioning of the administration at this level is very essential and desirable. Keeping in view, therefore, the temper of the times and the administrative requirements and challenges of the present, he can still be the hero in search of the role—a very positive one—that will not only provide him creative satisfaction but also promote good Government, which inspires public confidence, is responsive to public needs, respects the common man and is dedicated to the common good. But with full awareness of the realities of today, his sights have to be set at the duties and responsibilities of tomorrow and not lost in the haze of yearnings and nostalgia for the past.

## THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER

IN

### UTTAR PRADESH

By

M. A. QURAISHI

*Divisional Commissioner*

With the advent of Independence and the acceptance of a Welfare State as the objective, the traditional role of the District Officer underwent a drastic change in almost all the States of India. During the British period he was a mighty and proud man, representing his King and the Government at the district level, wielding powers and prestige second to none in the hierarchy of public servants in the field. In fact, he was the uncrowned ruler of his territory—a Ma-Baap to his people. He was the District Magistrate, Collector (in some areas called Deputy Commissioner) and District Officer and in the hills and backward areas also acted as the District Judge, Superintendent of Police, Conservator of Forests, Settlement Officer and Record Officer, all rolled into one.

As District Magistrate he was the head of the Magistracy and had considerable control over the police and the jails and was mainly responsible for the law and order and crime situation. As Collector, he was the head of revenue staff, responsible for collection of land revenue and other government dues and also for maintenance of land records. One of his foremost duties as Collector was to keep constant watch over the condition of the crops and peasantry and to report to Government immediately on the occurrence of any natural calamity like famine, floods, droughts, fire, etc., and to take all measures for help and to recommend suspension or remission of land revenue, grant of taqavi or gratuitous relief. Both as District Magistrate and Collector he had some judicial functions as he also heard appeals from the orders of second class Magistrates and Collectors. As Collector he was also responsible for acquisition of land under Land Acquisition Act for public purposes. As a

District Officer he performed multifarious duties which perhaps hardly had a parallel anywhere. He was in-charge of the Treasury, District Stamp Office and the Civil Supplies, issued licences for fire-arms, cinemas, explosive shops, excise shops and sometimes even for motor vehicles; exercised statutory powers on District Boards, Municipal Boards, Notified Areas and Town Areas and acted as a channel of correspondence between them and the higher authorities. In short, he acted as a general factotum of the district and had all the residuary powers where they were not strictly defined or prescribed. He gave audience to his "mulaqatis" on fixed days and timings which were invariably respected and was not surprised when even such unusual requests of help were made, i.e., marrying a marriageable daughter, recovery of a reluctant bride or a wife from father-in-law's house or help in a judicial case pending before a District Judge or even a High Court Judge. If he raised an eyebrow or shrugged his shoulders, at once would come the reply "Sarkar or Hajoor ma-baap hai—sab kuch karsakte hai"—Your honour is like father or mother to me and can do everything". It was indeed a remarkable feature of British Administration in India that an average Indian particularly in rural areas had an almost unshakable and limitless faith in the justice and impartiality of the District Officer so long as the dispute was between Indians and when it had nothing to do with the political struggle for the independence of the country.

These were the main duties of the District Magistrate/Collector/District Officer in India under the British rule for almost 150 years and the pattern changed but very slightly during



this period. The Collector was the pivot or the keystone of the British administration, the unit of which was a district. This position has not changed even now as the district is still a unit of administration and the man on the spot to run the district administration is the Collector. This position is bound to continue as there must be a Collector for every district. In fact, after Independence there was a tremendous increase in the duties and functions of the District Officer due to the change in the purpose of our State from a "Police State" into a "Welfare State" with the goal of a "socialist pattern of society". More and more work has devolved on the Collector in the post-Independence period and he is expected to deliver the goods, be it a human census or cattle census, "Van Mahotsava", Wild Life Preservation, Small Savings, raising of loans for the State Government or for that matter any work connected with the district in matters of public sector, general welfare, administration, development and planning, etc. No doubt, the role has changed in spite of the fact that the District Officer today not only performs almost all the duties which his predecessor did prior to the Independence but much more. The change has affected his status, i.e., from being a virtual ruler of his district he is now a public servant though, no doubt he has still the privilege of being the first citizen in his district.

How this change in the role has been brought about in Uttar Pradesh as in the rest of the country will now be examined. The Appendix gives in detail the functions of a District Officer in his various capacities. It would suffice here to mention some of the important changes in his duties and functions and to examine their actual working in practice with suggestions for improvement, where necessary.

### **District Magistrate**

Several new Acts and Statutes have been enacted which the District Magistrate has to enforce, but broadly speaking major changes in his role as District Magistrate have taken place, as below:

(i) The District Magistrate by virtue of his statutory powers under different laws is responsible for the maintenance of law and order

in his district, no doubt with the active co-operation and assistance of the police. The District Magistrate represents the Government at the district level in all spheres of official activities. In the past, i.e., prior to Independence, the position of the District Magistrate in all matters at district level including law and order was quite clear and unquestioned as he represented the King and the Government at the district level. In the post-Independence period, unfortunately, the District Magistrate wields the same power theoretically but in practice he has gradually lost that position and prestige with the result that he does not have the same effective and almost final word in various matters, including law and order. This has resulted in the weakening of the district administration, particularly the police administration and the law and order and crime situation. There is, therefore, a case for giving more effective and real powers to the District Magistrate in the law and order matters than what he is exercising at present. Being too busy with his numerous duties, he has lost the old grip on the law and order and crime. The number of crimes has gone up considerably and he finds it very difficult to maintain a close personal supervision with the result that an average District Magistrate depends too much on his S.P. who has gradually started becoming somewhat independent even in matters of policy. There is, in fact, a growing demand in some quarters that the S.P. should be made exclusively responsible for law and order and crime. This is an unreasonable demand and it was not tolerated in a Police State under the British and its adoption in the present Welfare and Democratic State would be, to my mind, a retrogressive step and would make the police rather arbitrary and irresponsible by reducing the position of a District Magistrate to that of a departmental head, a mere collector of revenue and a multi-purpose superior officer. There should be no dual system, i.e., responsibility should not be shared with any one including the S.P. as it occasionally leads to friction between the two, which ultimately reacts adversely on the district administration. The District Magistrate should lay down the policy as before, no doubt in consultation with the S.P. and his own officers, but he should have the final word in law and order matters and the police and the other magistracy should be responsible for carrying out his orders.

(ii) Due to the democratic set-up, a change has already come in the role of the District Magistrate as he is not generally in a position to take drastic action on the least provocation, which he could do before, without being responsible to any one, excepting the Government. Now the public opinion counts and the District Magistrate has to take it into consideration and also take the public into confidence, where necessary. Representatives of the people, M.Ps., M.L.As., M.L.Cs., also try to influence his decision and he has a very difficult part to play today as compared with his predecessor. It becomes all the more difficult when important and influential men of the ruling party try to bring pressure. Sometimes all these influences result in vacillation or hesitation in taking drastic action promptly with disastrous consequences, as a few hours of delay may let loose unsocial elements always ready to fish in the troubled waters. Therefore, with the poverty, ignorance and other conditions still prevailing in India, the District Magistrate must continue to be held squarely responsible for law and order. He should have full assurance of Government that no enquiry will be held into disturbances in case action taken by him is adequate and within bounds. Only where action taken is inadequate or overzealous, i.e., he uses more force than the minimum necessary to quell disturbances that an enquiry will be ordered. So long as he takes a balanced action without fear and favour, he need have no fears regarding any enquiry, judicial or otherwise.

(iii) Another important change in the role of District Magistrate almost all over U.P. is separation of executive from the judiciary. Under this scheme A.D.Ms. Judicial have been appointed with powers of D.M. under the Cr.P.C. and of a Collector under the Land Revenue Act. They have a number of Judicial Officers in the grade of P.C.S. officers depending on the nature of work in each district, ranging from 3 to 6 working under them. These officers work directly under the Commissioners of Divisions and are not subordinate to the District Magistrates, who do not supervise their work or record any entry in their character rolls. The A.D.Ms. Judicial hold an enquiry into the Sessions cases and also perform some other original work besides inspections and general supervision over the work of Judicial Officers and also inspect

Jails. The Judicial Officers do all the I.P.C. cases and most of the regular revenue cases under the Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act and U.P. Tenancy Act.

The S.D.Ms./S.D.Os. still function under the D.M./Collector and look after the cases under the Cr.P.C., mostly preventive sections, miscellaneous criminal cases under various Acts and revenue cases under the Land Revenue Act and some cases also under the Z.A. & L.R. Act and Tenancy Acts. However, the bulk of the case work, both criminal and revenue, is now looked after by full-time Judicial Officers, who do no other work except in an emergency when the District Magistrate is authorised to take up law and order or any other duty of executive nature. This scheme has resulted in quicker disposal of cases and less arrears.

(iv) Another change worth mention is about the local bodies. Formerly the District Magistrates had considerable control over them and their local knowledge of the men and affairs of the Boards helped the local bodies considerably. Gradually with the reorganisation of the functions of the Commissioners/Collectors in their relation to local bodies, the Collectors have been divested of most of their statutory powers over the District Boards, Municipal Boards, Notified Areas. They have still got them over Town Areas. The District Boards have now been replaced by Zila Parishads and will be dealt with separately but in my experience the working of Municipal Boards/Notified Areas has deteriorated since the District Magistrates have lost their old control. Owing to democratic decentralisation at all levels, I would not suggest that the old position should be restored but I see no point in having the Commissioners as the Prescribed Authority for Notified Areas and smaller Municipal Boards. The Commissioners can deal with first class or indebted Boards but the rest can easily and better be looked after by the Collectors. However, the channel of correspondence with the Government should remain as at present, i.e., through the Commissioners, so that where necessary Government may have the benefit of the views of the Commissioners.

#### **Collector/Deputy Commissioner**

(i) Although more or less he has still the same functions as before, but a big change has

taken place due to the abolition of the zamindari in the State from July 1, 1952. Instead of dealing with a few zamindars and a fewer "lambardars" responsible for payment of land revenue, the Collector has now to deal with lacs of cultivators directly for land revenue, canal and taqavi dues and many other dues, all of which have increased tremendously due to a change in the purpose of State and also the disappearance of zamindars. A huge integrated staff from Naib Tahsildars to Amins has to be engaged and supervised by the Collector who has also to deal with service conditions and disciplinary proceedings against them. Maintenance of correct accounts these days has become very difficult as accounts are both voluminous and complicated. The collection work is by no means easy and open to all sorts of interference and pressures at all levels from the Amin to the Collector. Cases of direct interference are also not rare. This results in huge surpluses and arrears. While surpluses give a good picture of cent per cent collections, in fact arrears are mounting up khatawise "Bebaqi", i.e., complete clearance is still pious wish. In one division alone, I found a arrears of nearly 1½ crores for taqavi dues only since the abolition of zamindari.

(ii) Sometimes pressures are exercised even in matters of remission or suspension of revenue, canal dues and taqavi dues. In one case the Collector acting under extraneous influences reported the losses to be much more than what they actually were. His report was not accepted and on a fresh enquiry it was found to be altogether wrong. All the Collectors were, therefore, told not to act under any influence and to express their opinion freely, without fear or favour and the Commissioners were asked to supervise this work in case of extensive damage due to any unnatural calamity. This is an example of the difficulties which a Collector faces these days but the remedy is obvious that he must act independently and strictly under the rules and regulations and he should have the support of his superior officers and the Government.

(iii) The abolition of zamindari involved tremendous work for the Collector in the collection of Z.A.F. (Zamindari Abolition Fund), Z.A.C. (payment of compensation to ex-intermediaries), and preparation of adivasi compensation statements for landholders for loss of their rights and rehabilitation grants to

the zamindars. Government had also enacted A.I.T. and L.L.H.T. Acts on large holdings exceeding 30 acres in its effort to tap agricultural sources to increase its revenue. These two acts have now been replaced by the U.P. Imposition of Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1960. The Collectors have to supervise the working of these Acts and to collect revenue from these sources. All this has further added to their work and brought them into closer contact with the cultivators, which a good Collector can exploit advantageously for an all-round improvement in his district.

(iv) Another big change which has added to Collector's work is the consolidation of holdings in 38 out of 54 districts. Under the Act he acts as District Deputy Director of Consolidation and in that capacity, apart from exercising supervision and control over the entire machinery engaged in the work, he has to hear appeals and revisions against the orders of Settlement Officers (Consolidation). In actual practice he is not able to cope with this huge work and so a Deputy Director is sent from Headquarters to dispose of the major portion of the appellate work but the administrative work is the responsibility of the Collector. This work has again established a very close contact with the actual tillers of the soil and can be of great help to the Collector.

(v) In matters of land acquisition also, the work has increased beyond measure. This work used to be nominal before Independence. Now due to the three Five Year Plans and the change in the purpose of the State a large number of projects are in progress in each district and the Collector has to do a good deal of work himself although a separate officer, Joint Magistrate or a Deputy Collector, usually exercises the powers of the Collector and is responsible for it.

### District Officer

(i) As a District Officer he performs numerous duties of amazing and staggering nature. That a good, bad or indifferent Collector is somehow able to manage the show or even deliver the goods is a tribute to the efficient system left to us in legacy by the British. To the multifarious works which he performed during the British time, many more including the most important duties relating to planning and development works have been added.

Others have changed nature and volume, i.e., formerly he had hardly any protocol duties; now a bigger district has too many visits and Government had to appoint a Reception Officer but still the District Officer's presence is inevitable and this causes a serious dislocation in his work. Something has to be done to do away with his presence in most of the cases. Similarly, the business of interviewing officials and non-officials which used to be comfortable and pleasant on fixed days and timings is now half a day's job almost daily including Sundays and gazetted holidays. Many Collectors have come to grief and have been disillusioned when they tried to follow the example of their illustrious predecessors.

(ii) Numerous other changes, both important and unimportant have taken place in the functions and duties of a District Officer. To quote just a few, Parliamentary and Assembly questions, five yearly elections, increased correspondence, numerous enquiries and complaints and verification of character, etc. The procedure regarding enquiries against Government servants has also been considerably changed as a result of the findings of the Disciplinary Proceedings Committee appointed in the State and the rulings of the High Court and Supreme Court. An elaborate enquiry has to be conducted by the Collector under the present rules in matters of dismissal, removal and reduction. The Collector is the appointing authority of a huge staff these days and the work involved can be easily imagined.

(iii) However, the biggest change in his role as a District Officer took place relating to development and planning duties. Formerly he had none—an unusual Collector like Col. Brayne took some interest in the rural development work. After the country secured Independence and the First Five Year Plan was formulated for the economic betterment of the land, the rural development programme emerged in the form of Community Development Projects which were first launched on October 2, 1952. One of the most significant changes brought about by the Community Development Programme was to introduce the idea of co-ordination at the State, District and Block levels. In the Community Development Programme no separate administrative machinery or hierarchy was created and the programme was integrated into the general administrative system of the country. The

Collector thus became responsible for implementation of Community Development work at the district level and he was given the role of captain and co-ordinator of the development programme to be carried out in the district. The new programme highlighted the Collector's role in planning, development and co-ordination. He was brought directly on the line organisation which has the Development Commissioner at the top and the village level worker at the bottom. Besides, as the close relationship between the Community Development Programme and the programmes under the Five Year Plans began to become apparent and the responsibility for the former began to devolve on the Development Departments as well, the Collector's position as the captain and co-ordinator over the entire field of development began to become more specific and as Sri B. Mukerji puts it "one of expanding responsibilities and growing complexities". Required to play a more specific role than what was earlier a vague role of a captain, and made answerable for showing progress in the field of development, particularly Community Development, the Collector began asking for effective powers over the district-level Development Officers and when dissatisfied with their work and co-operation began to complain to the Development Commissioner, bypassing the Heads of Departments. Heads of Departments resisted the Collectors being given any powers over their district officers, and where these were given, complained that they were losing control over their district Officers and could not be held responsible for their performance and progress of work.

(iv) In Uttar Pradesh the problems created as a result of these circumstances were sought to be solved by a system which came to be known by the general term "Pooling" in respect of which first steps were taken in 1951-52. Some development departments, namely, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Panchayat, Prantiya Rakshak Dal and Harijan Welfare were pooled at the district level and the district offices of these departments were merged into which is known as the "District Pooled Planning Office" and placed under the direct administrative control of the District Planning Officer or Additional District Magistrate (P) who was either a Senior PCS Officer or a Junior IAS Officer on the district strength and worked as the Collector's Chief lieutenant for the effective



supervision of development programme. The other nation-building departments, namely, Irrigation, Medical and Public Health and Public Works were not brought in the pooled set-up but the heads of these departments were made members of a body which was entrusted with the responsibility of guidance, supervision and co-ordination at the district level, known as the District Planning Committee. The Collector was the Chairman of this body and the District Planning Officer/Additional District Magistrate (P) was its Secretary. The heads of all nation-building departments as well as the representative non-official elements of the district were members of the Committee, and it was felt that the activities of the departments not brought in the planning pool would be effectively co-ordinated in this manner. In actual practice, however, the Collector could never devote the major portion of his time and attention to planning and development work and since other duties, namely, general administration, law and order and revenue continued to be his chief concern, the Govind Sahai Committee appointed by the U.P. Government for evaluating the work in N.E.S. and Community Projects rightly came to the conclusion that the original idea that the Collector should devote himself chiefly to development work and his other duties should be attended to by the Additional Collector was nothing more than a pious hope and in view of the Collector's special position as the District Officer, the arrangement originally envisaged was hardly likely to work well. An able Collector with good human qualities, keen on his development work, secured good co-ordination even against odds. Where heads of development departments with similar qualities helped the results were even better. On the other hand, indifferent Collectors could contribute nothing. The Collector is in status, prestige, emoluments head and shoulders above most other members of the team and co-ordination is, therefore, often mistaken by him and his colleagues as subordination. In order to suggest ways and means for securing maximum possible efficiency and economy and avoiding wastage owing to delays and bottlenecks and to suggest a procedure for more effective co-ordination at the various levels of Government, the National Development Council constituted a Committee on Plan Projects. This Committee appointed Balwantrai Mehta team to study and report on the Community Projects and National

Extension Service and this team suggested the new system of local government which has come to be known by the name of "Panchayat Raj" or democratic decentralisation. The recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta Committee are too well known to be repeated here.

(v) A start was made by merging the District Boards and the Planning Committees with the Collector as Chairman of Antrim Zila Parishads which functioned from May 1, 1958 to July 28, 1961. However, the function of the Planning Committee was merely advisory. Government, therefore, enacted the Uttar Pradesh Kshettra Samitis and Zila Parishads Bill, 1960, the preamble of which reads as below:

"Whereas it is expedient to provide for the establishment of Kshettra Samitis and Zila Parishads in the districts of Uttar Pradesh to undertake certain governmental functions at Kshettra and district levels respectively in furtherance of the principle of democratic decentralisation of Governmental functions and for ensuring proper municipal Government in rural areas, and to correlate the powers and functions of Gaon Sabhas under the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act, 1947, with Kshettra Samitis and Zila Parishads."

This is awaiting the assent of the President, after which the Panchayat Raj is going to be inaugurated by our Prime Minister soon. Meanwhile, the Collector has been replaced by an elected non-official Chairman and elections were also conducted for constituting the Panchayats and the Panchayats have indirectly elected the Kshettra Samitis at the block level and the Zila Parishad at the district level. In this bill a number of deviations have been made from the recommendations contained in the C.O.P.P. report. Whereas the Balwantrai Mehta team had conceived of the Panchayat Samitis (designated Kshettra Samitis in the U.P. legislation) as the most important link in the chain of Government through local bodies, the powers, functions and financial resources of these bodies in U.P. are limited. Again, the Balwantrai Mehta team envisaged Zila Parishad as the district body for ensuring necessary co-ordination between Panchayat Samitis and suggested that the Collector should be its Chairman. In Uttar Pradesh the Zila Parishad will not only be the co-ordinating body at the district level, but will also have certain statu-



tory powers and functions regarding animal husbandry, village and cottage industries, medical and public health, education and cultural activities, public works, relief works and planning and statistics. Besides, the Chairman of the Zila Parishad (to be designated as the Adhyaksh) will be an elected non-official and not the Collector. The Uttar Pradesh system differs from other experiments elsewhere in two broad respects. Firstly, the Collector is neither the President nor a member of the Zila Parishad, and secondly, in spite of these handicaps he is still expected to use his good offices for the purposes of co-ordination of development activities at the district level.

(vi) The scope of the powers and functions of the Zila Parishad is very wide and covers animal husbandry, village and cottage industries, medical and public health, education, cultural activities, public works, relief and planning. The planning staff of the district would hereafter work under the control and direction of the Zila Parishad and the Kshettra Samitis and the Adhyaksh and the Pramukh would record their assessment of the work done by the public servants and send it to the Government. With the constitution of the Zila Parishads and the Kshettra Samitis the sphere of activities of the District Officer has been considerably reduced. The District Officer is no longer directly associated with the most important sphere of Governmental activity, viz., planning and development. No doubt, the District Officer has been given the following powers and functions under the Act:

- (a) He can record in writing, for consideration of the Parishad, any observations he thinks proper in regard to its proceedings or duties;
- (b) He can call a meeting of himself, the Adhyaksh and the Mukhya Adhikari to discuss matters relating to expenditure from the budget grant of the Parishad relating to planning and development;
- (c) He is empowered to obtain necessary reports from the Parishad and to furnish a quarterly report to the State Government about the progress of development works; and

(d) If authorised by the Commissioner in this behalf

- (i) he may take part in the discussion of the Zila Parishad, and
- (ii) send communications to the Zila Parishad for its consideration and discussion. It shall be the duty of the Parishad to arrange for the communications being read and discussed in the meeting and to carry out the directives contained in such communications.

In spite of this it is feared in some quarters and some of the District Officers appear to have the view that the District officer would not be able to guide, advise and effectively supervise the developmental activities of the district except in special circumstances when he can direct the Zila Parishad to carry out a certain work in the interest of public safety, such directives being endorsed by the Government later. They expect that the Collector would be able to achieve some sort of co-ordination in their activities through the Chief Executive Officer of the Parishad who will also be the District Planning Officer or the Additional District Magistrate (P).

(vii) Before the adoption of this measure the District Officer through his SDOs and the District Planning Officers was responsible entirely for all the developmental activities. He was expected to inspect all the Development Blocks and issue necessary directives to see that planning programme was effectively implemented. He was also President of the Action Committee which reviewed the problems of various departments associated with planning and effective decisions could be taken to remove the bottlenecks. It would, thus, appear that whereas the Collector has been divested of almost all the statutory powers for the execution of development schemes, yet it is still proposed to use his office for the purposes of overall co-ordination at the district level. He has, in the words of Sri S. K. Dey, to act as "ears and eyes of Government.. and a guide, philosopher and friend of the Zila Parishad". Recently, while inaugurating the Commissioners' Conference at Lucknow, our Chief Minister stressed the role of the Commissioners and the District Officers in the new set-up under the Zila Parishad. He pointed out that "it was a

revolutionary change that the State Government had brought about in the administration. In the democratic set-up, it was necessary that the people and their representatives should have an effective voice in all welfare activities concerning them. So far during the two Plan periods, the planning and development work was almost being done by the official machinery and the District Planning Committees were just advisory bodies. It was essential to enlist the active co-operation and participation of the people to make the big Third Five Year Plan, of which U.P. alone has a share of 500 crores, that the people should govern themselves through Zila Parishads and Kshettra Samities in matters relating to their progress and welfare. It was, therefore, necessary that all the officials, particularly the Commissioners and the Collectors should fully co-operate with these bodies, help and guide them in the discharge of their onerous responsibilities. They represent the Government and while it was their duty to keep a watch over the work of these bodies, it was necessary to give all help and co-operation so that the scheme may be a success. Other officers will follow the example of the Commissioners and Collectors."

(viii) The above will show that even now the District Officer has to be vigilant to ensure that the policies of the Government are effectively translated at the district level by the non-official organisations. With the adoption of the Third Five Year Plan, there is greater need for speeding up the progress of agricultural production. Again, with the shift towards industry in the Third Five Year Plan, the District Officer has to see that industrial establishments, specially in rural areas, have to be established and also keep in view the resources and manpower needed for the implementation of projects of State and National importance. It is the District Officer who will represent the interests of the Union and State Government and accordingly act as a modifying influence on the various local bodies in the district. This would be a job which would need the highest qualities of leadership and on which will depend the success of the Collector. If unfortunately with this change, an average Collector adopts a detached outlook on the planning and development work and does not consider himself as an active partner with the Zila Parishad, I am afraid, the success of the Third Five Year Plan so far as the rural areas

are concerned will be impeded to a considerable extent. However, I hope all the Collectors will keep in view the advice given by the Prime Minister to the civil servants of today in his Presidential address delivered some years ago at the Indian Institute of Public Administration. "Public administration, apart from the normal features that it should have, should be intimately concerned with public co-operation. The idea of a public servant sitting in a world apart and doling out impartial justice is completely out of place in a democratic society and much more so in a dynamic democratic society, which is moving forward. In a period of dynamic growth, we want as civil servants, persons who are not, if I may use the word without any disrespect, merely head clerks but people with minds, people with vision, people with a desire to achieve, who have some initiative for doing a job and who can think how to do it. The success of the public servant lies, in addition to ability, efficiency and integrity, upon his capacity to co-operate with the public. It is an essential requirement of the public servant of today. If he cannot meet it, all his efficiency is not of much use. His real success in his job depends on the extent to which he can evoke public co-operation."

These words of the Prime Minister apply fully to the difficult role which the Collector will now have to play in the changed set-up due to the passing of the Zila Parishad Bill. If he and his staff adopt a correct and co-operative attitude, their example would be followed by other district level or even regional level officers and the Zila Parishads should be able to discharge their onerous duties efficiently. It should be a proud role for the District Officer to play and any misgiving entertained in any quarter that as the District Officer has almost no statutory powers under the Zila Parishad Bill, he has now been wholly excluded or dissociated from welfare activities, is not correct. They can and should even now play an effective and exemplary role for the welfare of the people in their charge. The most important role of the Collector in the changed circumstances would be to give lead to the entire administrative personnel of the district on the above lines. His success in this task will depend on the extent to which he can combine in himself the functions of the first citizen with the duties of the first servant of the district.

## APPENDIX

### *I. Functions of District Magistrate*

1. To order magisterial postings during Festivals.
2. To promulgate orders under Section 144 Cr.P.C. whenever there is any danger of breach of public peace and tranquility.
3. To dispose of all the petitions and miscellaneous general complaints received from Government and others.
4. To make Jail inspections and expeditious disposal of cases of under-trial prisoners.
5. Grant of superior class to prisoners.
6. Premature release of prisoners.
7. Release of prisoners on parole.
8. To deal with mercy petitions from prisoners.
9. As head of criminal Administration of the district to control and direct the action of the Police.
10. To submit an annual criminal report to Government.
11. Appointment and punishment of village Chaukidar.
12. Inspections of Police Stations once a year.
13. To sanction expunction of a crime from the Crime Register.
14. Recovery of repatriation charges.
15. Accidents.
16. Payment of compensation under the Workmen's Compensation Act.
17. Labour problems—strikes, etc.
18. Recovery of cane cess.
19. Prosecution under Sugar Factories Control Act.
20. Infringement of Trade Mark Act.
21. Sanction of temporary electric connections including enquiries regarding breach.

22. Grant and cancellation of fire arm licences.
23. Grant and cancellation of explosive licences.
24. Grant and cancellation of petroleum licences.
25. Grant and cancellation of calcium carbide licence.
26. Supervision over Supply Office and Rent Control and Eviction Officer under Rent Control Act and in supply matters.
27. Supervision and control over local bodies, District Boards, Municipal Boards, Notified Areas and Town Areas and as channel for correspondence.
28. Enforcement of the Cinema and Entertainment and Betting Tax Act.
29. Recommendations for the issue of passports and visas.
30. Supervision of the work of probation officer.
31. Making of reception orders for lunatics.
32. Enforcement of the Press Act and disposal of declarations in respect of press and newspapers.
33. Administration of Nazul lands.
34. Recommendation of schemes for the development of forests.
35. Issue of permits for the cutting of trees.
36. Control and supervision of the work of elections in the district.
37. Issue of certificates for domicile, scheduled and backward classes, sole guardianship of a political sufferer, etc.
38. To provide for affixation of poles, etc.
  - on a private land or building for conveyance of the electric current.

### *II. Functions of Collector*

1. Collection of land revenue.
2. Collection of canal dues.
3. Collection of other Government dues.

4. Distribution of Taqavi loans.
5. Recovery of Taqavi dues.
6. Natural calamities—assessment of losses to crops and recommendations for relief.
7. Distribution of distress Taqavi.
8. Relief to fire sufferers.
9. All matters relating to Land Records.
10. Control over Land Records establishment, i.e., Lekhpals, Kanungo candidates, Supernumerary Kanungos, Supervisor Kanungos, Assistant Registrar Kanungos, Registrar Kanungos, Sadar Kanungos and Chairman or Land Records Offices.
11. To collect and furnish multifarious agrarian statistics regarding rainfall, crops, jinswar statements, Area statements, statements of holdings and rental and forecast of various crops.
12. Land acquisition work.
13. To sanction Land Revenue assignment.
14. Supervision of Treasury and Sub-treasuries.
15. Payment of Zamindari Abolition Compensation and Rehabilitation Grant.
16. Assessment and realisation of agriculture income-tax.
17. As Ex-Officio Deputy Director of Consolidation of Holdings hears appeals from the orders of the S.O.C. and the Consolidation Officers.
18. Taking relief measures in case of scarcity conditions caused by natural calamities like fire, drought, floods, waterlogging and excessive rains, etc.
19. Enforcement of Stamp Act.
20. Management of Government estates.
5. Controlling; Drawing and Disbursing Officer of the district staff.
6. To submit annual budget estimates.
7. To prepare estimates of works in respect of revenue buildings and is responsible for maintenance of all Government buildings under the charge of Revenue Department.
8. In-charge of the Treasury and District Stamp Office and responsible for verification of the security of Government treasurer.
9. Chairman/President of various local institutions. Some are member Regional Transport Authority, Roadways Advisory Committees and all are members Divisional Planning Committees.
10. To issue tentative tour programme of ministers and V.I.Ps.
11. Acts as Chief Protocol Officer in the district.
12. To arrange for their stay at circuit house or other inspection houses.
13. To compile and submit to the Rajasva Parishad annual administration report of the district.
14. To attend to the work of enquiries relating to character verification.
15. To supervise the proper conducting of the civil suits in which State is a party.
16. To appoint in the district Government counsels and panel lawyers.
17. To countersign fee bills of district Government counsel.
18. To make enquiries relating to the issue of certificates to homoeopaths and correspondence regarding registration and enrolment.
19. To countersign the grant-in-aid bills of various educational institutions.
20. Sale of excise shops.
21. Recovery of pauper suit dues and deficit court fees under the Stamp Act.
22. Interviews with members of public and officials.
23. To make enquiries regarding grant of financial aid to the cadets as well as to the scholars applying for scholarship/technical education loans, etc.

### *III-A. Functions of District Officer*

1. Postings, transfer and leave of Gazetted Officers within the district.
2. Posting, transfer and leave to Naib Tahsildar and Tahsildars.
3. Appointing and punishing authority in respect of ministerial and inferior servants of Collectorates and Tahsil staff and other allied officers.
4. To deal with pension cases of District staff.

24. In-charge of planning and development work and as chief co-ordinator till recently gave guidance to the entire field staff of all development departments at the district level and awarded annual entries to district heads of departments on their assistance in the planning work. Worked as an Adhyaksh of Antarim Zila Parishad (old District Board and planning and development work) from May 1, 1958 to July 28, 1961.

*III-B. Duties under the U.P. Kshettra Samitis and Zila Parishad Bill, 1960*

1. (a) To inspect or cause to be inspected any movable property used or occupied by a Parishad or any committee or joint committee thereof, or any work in progress under the direction of any of them;
- (b) by order in writing call for and inspect a book or documents in the possession or under the control of a Parishad or any committee or joint committee thereof;
- (c) by order in writing require a Parishad or any committee or joint committee thereof, to furnish such statements, accounts, reports (including monthly reports of progress) or copies of documents, relating to proceedings or duties as he thinks fit to call for; and
- (d) record in writing for the consideration of a Parishad or any committee

or joint committee thereof any observations he thinks proper in regard to its proceedings or duties.

2. To call from time to time after reasonable notice, a meeting of himself, the Adhyaksh and the Mukhya Adhikari and if considered necessary also the Vitta Adhikari to discuss matters relating to expenditure from the budget grant of the Parishad relating to planning and development.
3. To furnish quarterly reports to the State Government about the progress of development work.
4. In case of emergency to provide for the execution of any work, or the doing of any act which the Parishad or the Committee or Joint committee thereof is empowered to execute or do and the immediate execution or doing of which is, in his opinion, necessary for the safety or protection of the public and may direct that the expense of executing the work or doing the Act shall be forthwith paid by the Parishad.
5. To issue directives to the Zila Parishad for the exercise of its powers or performance of its duties and functions, if Commissioner delegates his powers to him, he may take part in the discussions of the Zila Parishad without, however, any right to vote; and send a communication to the Zila Parishad for being read at a meeting of the Zila Parishad and for discussion of such communication.



# THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DISTRICT OFFICER IN WEST BENGAL

By  
A. K. DATTA  
*District Magistrate*

The office of the District Magistrate—Collector-cum-District Officer—has always occupied a position of primacy in the district administration. The changing role of the District Officer flows essentially from the transition from the minimum government to the optimum government, from the regulatory-cum-revenue administration in a basically feudal and static society to the welfare and development administration in a democratic set-up, geared to planned economic progress. The change in the socio-economic and political context has thrown additional responsibilities on the District Officer and called for administrative leadership of a high order. Briefly speaking, his changing role is the impact of the following factors: Shift in the regulatory function with the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive; emergence of the Welfare State; rise of the democratic State; democratic decentralisation; requirement of land reforms; and finally, the compelling requirements of a development programme in a planned economy.

West Bengal has been a troubled border State and a problem State from the first days of the Partition. The burden of refugee immigration, communal rioting, industrial discontent and leftist activism beset this problem-ridden State from the beginning so that from the first days of Independence, the administrative machinery was hard pressed to cope with a situation of extreme urgency and peril. In such a situation, the law and order problem naturally remained a matter of primary importance for nearly a decade and even in the year 1955, the primary preoccupation of the District Officer was with the law and order problem. In a district like Nadia, from which I come, more than half the population

consists of refugee population as more than half of the original district of Nadia now lies in Pakistan. At one time the refugee colonies posed unusual administrative problems to the District Officer and the Superintendent of Police. A big refugee camp like the Cooper's Camp housed 50,000 refugees and was always a storm-centre of disturbances. Lawless and anti-social elements predominated. The residence of the District Officer was frequently besieged by thousands of demonstrators and firing had to be resorted to in camps and outside. In such a context the District Officer remained primarily absorbed with the law and order problem.

All these explain why the role of District Officer in West Bengal remained primarily confined to its security and regulatory functions till quite recently and until the Government had settled down to the problems of democratisation and development. The separation of the Judiciary from the Executive was taken up quite recently and has not yet proceeded far. Although proposals were mooted, as early as 1951, for taking the preliminary steps for separation of the Judiciary from the Executive, the overriding preoccupation of the Government and the shortage of officers prevented the working out of the scheme to any measurable extent. Consequently, the District Magistrate remained in the full possession of all his powers under the Criminal Procedure Code and held effective supervision over the work of the magistracy.

It was only in 1958 that the Government decided to take the first steps for the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive. Certain Magistrates were made whole-time trying Magistrates and the Senior Judicial Magistrate was appointed with powers of taking cogni-

zance and transfer. But all the preventive sections remained with the Sub-divisional Magistrate. It should be remembered that this change was made by an executive order, and not by an amendment of the law. Thus, the legal position remained unaffected so that the Sub-divisional Magistrate, although no longer taking the general file or trying ordinary cases, continued to be legally competent. Again the District Magistrate was free to transfer Magistrates from the Executive side to the Judicial side and the Judicial Magistrates also sought such transfer from time to time. This continued for two or three years but again the shortage of officers compelled many of the District Magistrates to obliterate in a partial way the difference between the Judicial Magistrates and the Executive Magistrates so that the Judicial Magistrates had also to be given charge of some executive departments from time to time or transferred to such executive departments.

It will, therefore, be seen that in West Bengal the Magisterial functions and the powers of the District Magistrate have remained up to date unattenuated except in a formal manner. The District and Sessions Judge who was formerly appointed from the Indian Civil Service is, however, now appointed by promotion from the State Judicial Service and not from the Indian Administrative Service. The Magistrates who are appointed in the Judicial side as Judicial Magistrates feel that they have no scope or future prospects and, therefore, tend to come back to the Executive side after some time. The separation of the Judiciary from the Executive will, therefore, require the creation of a separate cadre of Judicial Officers with prospects of promotion into and integration with the regular Judicial service. As it is, a District Officer in West Bengal continues to combine in him till today the Executive and Magisterial powers in spite of the simulation of separation.

Nevertheless, the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive is bound to be taken up at an early stage and the District Magistrate would presently cease to have effective control over the Judicial Magistrates and will have to remain content with the preventive sections of the Criminal Procedure Code. In a progressive civilised society, the separation of the Judiciary from the executive is no doubt a correct and necessary constitutional arrangement. In abnormal times, however, when the general

law and order situation completely breaks down or communal rioting is abroad, combination of the magisterial and executive powers is of considerable advantage. It is hoped, however, that such conditions of general lawlessness as prevailed in West Bengal during the initial years of Independence will be a rare thing in future and the District Officer will be able to do without his invisible control over the Magistracy.

The transition from the law and order State to the welfare and development State in a democratic set-up, has had certain compelling effects on the role of the District Officer. In the British days the administration was largely paternalistic in tenor and the public was accustomed to know the District Officer as the "ma-baap" in a way which one very rarely finds elsewhere. Today the common man is beginning to think that it may want its administrators who are its servants but it is not yet sure. And the Administrator is also not quite sure whether he is the master or the servant. The confused state of things immediately after the Independence led to considerable uncertainty. In many places there was palpable political interference and the District Magistrate as the prime officer in the district necessarily became the converging point for all pressure groups at district level. Experience varies from district to district but while the situation has definitely improved in recent years, it has not been uncommon for District Officers to be faced with pressures even in respect of grant of licence for bus routes or cinemas for which the law has laid down a rigid statutory procedure and where all orders are appealable to higher tribunals. In West Bengal where we had continuity of administration, collision of political and administrative powers has been largely avoided although peremptory transfers of Collectors have not been wholly unknown. The correct relationship between political power and the administration at district level has to be worked out and an appropriate code of conduct adopted so that administration may work without fear or favour for the common good. If injustice is done in an individual case, there is every reason why it should be brought to the notice of the administrator. But it would be totally improper to try to secure jobs or favours for individuals by methods of influence without even-handed regard for the strict merit of each case. The relationship

between the politician and the official at district level is, in many ways, a new one, and in my experience, I have known of clashes which have come from misunderstanding and ignorance rather than from any deliberate desire to do wrong on either side. The District Officer is still looked upon by the common villager as the embodiment of a paternalistic Government and the benevolent head of a bureaucracy. On the contrary, individuals seeking their own interest, are apt to operate on pliant politicians who bring pressure to bear on the District Officer on their behalf.

Another factor which had led to a certain uncertainty in the position and role of the District Officer has been the increasing trend towards democratic decentralisation. The impetus behind this experiment of democratic decentralisation has been to tap the latent energy of the masses for more effective implementation of Community Development Programmes. In West Bengal, the Panchayats are only just beginning to get into stride in the Block areas. In some of the Anchals where election has been held, it has been found that the Panchayats have not been working to satisfaction. The Pradhans have been prevented from functioning by reckless factionalism or even by reference to Civil Courts or High Courts. The fear that this democratic decentralisation will transfer factionalism to the village level, has not been wholly without foundation.

The Anchal Panchayats have not, therefore, been able up to now to fulfil all the expectations in regard to implementation of the Community Development Programme and other development work in the region. On the contrary, it has posed certain problems for the District Officer himself. The old Union Boards were effectively controlled by the District Officer with the help of his Circle Officers and these Union Boards operated almost as a limb of the district machinery. On the other hand, the consciousness of political power and the emergence of the elective machinery at village level, have reflected back on the District Officer. The old District Board is becoming a redundant organisation and at the same time these new Anchal Panchayats have not yet come into their own. There is, therefore, a fearsome void and urgent pressure for the rationalisation of the structure of

district administration in the context of democratic decentralisation. The Zilla Parishad or the District Council has not yet been set up in West Bengal. But the framework of democratic decentralisation has to be thought out in clear terms because the Anchals are too small regions to be effective and an appropriate body either at Block level or at district level has to be set up and its relationship with the district administration in general and the District Officer in particular has to be worked out. The chronic squabbles even in an elective body like the Calcutta Corporation, in spite of the highly educated electorate, have become almost an anathema stultifying all development and progress. It is to be hoped that such factionalism will not be transferred to the sub-regions within the district and this can only be done by defining the relationship of the District Officer and other district level officers in relation to these elective organisations. The permanent secretaries of the Anchal Panchayats should belong to a cadre of transferable service so that they may remain aloof from local factionalism. If these safeguards are made, the administrative machinery may remain uncontaminated and the latent power of the people, their highest loyalties and constructive abilities harnessed for the good of the country. Only thus may the district administration move down nearer to the people for whom it must work. The new institutions of democratic decentralisation will function effectively, only to the extent that new ideas, ideals and values are developed at ground level and meanwhile the stewardship of the district officer must remain available to hold the balance.

The most important change which has been emerging in relation to the role of the District Officer has been in relation to development work in the context of a planned economy, calling for an increasing measure of administrative co-ordination and administrative leadership. Initially, when the Community Development Programme was inaugurated in West Bengal in 1952, there was a tendency to develop a parallel administrative structure with the District Officer left severely alone on the sideline. All over the State, Blocks were set up which dealt directly with the Development Department at Calcutta. The other nation-building departments also operated through their separate hierarchies, directly with the Blocks with their own officers posted in the Block. In the Block itself, the

Block Development Officer was only nominally the head of the Block organisation. Actually he was little more than a landlord, offering free accommodation to officers of different departments whose range of activities was not infrequently unknown to him. This was quite bewildering for the public for they did not know to whom they should approach. Except that the Block Development Officer was the disbursing officer, the different types of specialist staff worked almost independently of his supervision. Even village level workers were appointed, transferred and dealt with from State Headquarters.

Gradually there was a process of delegation because, as the number of Blocks progressively increased, the Development Department found it increasingly impossible to deal with them from State Headquarters. Ultimately a stage was reached when it was found that it was necessary to get the District Officer "involved in development programme" both in planning and in execution. The first step was taken in August, 1959, when the Development Commissioner emphasised that the local schemes in relation to small irrigation and drainage, drinking water supply, local roads, and cottage and small industries should be prepared from below and co-ordinated at district level before being submitted to the State for inclusion in the Five Year Plan. Besides the Block Development Committee, the Sub-divisional Development Committee and District Development Council had been set up to elicit popular opinion in its bearing on development plans. At that stage the District Officer was to collate all the local schemes and assign them priorities and submit them in a consolidated manner to the State Government.

Even in 1959, however, the District Officer was not brought into the picture in regard to execution of the schemes. Bottlenecks, therefore, developed and it was found that it was not sufficient if the different nation-building departments made allotments to the Block Development Officers and it was considered necessary to build up a "single line organisation" with the District Officer poised crucially at the top at the district level. The importance of unified approach as a team was emphasised. It was only on the 9th of June, 1961, that the Chief Minister of West Bengal called a meeting of all District Officers. The

Chief Minister gave an outline of the provision of funds available in the Budget of a Community Development Block for expenditure during its stage I and stage II periods. The prevailing procedure was for the different departments making allotment of funds under their respective sectors to the Directorates which in their turn allotted the funds to the Block Development Officers, after obtaining from them all necessary particulars in respect of each scheme. The Chief Minister pointed out that this remote control was necessarily weak and largely ineffective, especially as the number of Blocks in the State exceeded 200. Fear was expressed that the District Magistrate with his hands full, would be unable to shoulder these additional tasks. All the District Magistrates, however, agreed to take up this work on their own shoulders and the new system was evolved whereby the different departments would allow funds for different schemes to the District Officer who in his turn would make allotments to the various Blocks in the district according to their individual requirements and capabilities. This new system has just started working in West Bengal. The District Officer has thus been tardily brought back into the picture of development and planning and come to acquire a key position in the hierarchy of officers at district level with function of co-ordination in planning as well as execution. The unreal conflict between functional vs. territorial principles of organisation has thus been resolved.

The District Officer is, therefore, now recognised as the captain of a team of district-level officers of different nation-building departments. He is required to meet regularly all other district level officers once a week or once a fortnight and straighten out bottlenecks and difficulties that might arise in connection with the implementation of the programmes. The problem of administrative co-ordination has, therefore, devolved on the District Officer squarely both in planning and in execution and the single line organisation has been accepted with the District Officer occupying the keystone of the arch at the district level. It is a most interesting study how the District Officer, who was originally only a Revenue Officer, has been turned into a generalist administrator. With the acquisition of the estates and the abolition of the zamindari in West Bengal, which was the home of



the Permanent Settlement, the revenue administration of the Collector has no doubt increased in range and depth. However, the Collector has been given the assistance of an Additional Collector for the Estates Acquisition Department and it is the Additional Collector who now in West Bengal deals with the revenue administration effectively. The Collector has, thus, been virtually relieved of his revenue functions in consonance with the recommendations of the Balvantrai Mehta Study Team and the law and order as well as development aspects remain his main charge. As we have seen, only about six months back the District Collector has come to assume the key position in the hierarchy of development officers and entrusted with the functions of leadership and co-ordination. The main justification of putting the Collector in the position of the captain of the team of all development officers functioning at district level is, no doubt, to take full advantage of the prestige and position which the District Officer has always enjoyed in the district. The primacy of the District Officer in the district set-up is unquestioned. Even with the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive, the common man continues to hold him in awe and reverence. The growth of democratic decentralisation and the uncertain operation of political pressure groups have left the District Officer with prestige undiminished in a large measure. It is the district administration which has direct contact with the people. It is the District Officer who remains the eye and the ear and the hand of the Government in the district. And especially in times of emergency, all powers and responsibilities gravitate to him.

In fact, the new age finds the District Officer saddled with new functions and responsibilities and with no erosion of his unquestioned authority. Unlike the French Prefect, the District Officer has become the head of the district administration, not by design but by pre-emption. He is the captain of the district team, the chairman of the assembly of district officials or president of the cabinet of district heads of administration. He is the direct agent of the Government and "the man on the spot". His functions have become much heavier with the widening and deepening of district administration and this calls for fresh definition of functions and

relationships with other departmental officers as well as the elective bodies.

The new situation, therefore, calls for new men, new machinery, new methods and new relationships. There has been a tendency for senior officers to remain in the Secretariat leaving only comparatively, junior officers to man the district post. It has now to be understood that the district administration is as vital and responsible a work as that in the Secretariat and there should be a free flow of senior officers as District Officers. The post of the District Officer has, therefore, to be made more attractive for senior officers by grant of special pay, free accommodation or otherwise. The Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Archibald Rowlands which was set up in 1944, and which reported in 1945, drew attention to the primitive conditions prevailing in district offices. The situation has become worse now with the heavy accretion of functions and responsibilities of the District Officer. The Rowlands Committee pointed out that even the office accommodation and equipment of District Officers were primitive. Today the various branches of the District Office are located in unsuitable rented houses, often at great distances from one another and ill-equipped with simple office equipments or even telephone. There should be a District Secretariat with modern office accommodation in which the offices of all departments in the district may be housed with ample inter-communication facilities conducive to administrative co-ordination and despatch. It will greatly increase the efficiency of the administration and lower the cost. Similarly, the method has also to be changed with greater delegation of powers as well as of financial authority. There should be a housing scheme for the staff, if staff efficiency has to be maintained. In fact, if the district administration has to prove itself equal to its vastly increased responsibilities in the Third Five Year Plan and the Fourth, and the emergence of the elective bodies under democratic decentralisation, men, machinery, methods and relationships in district administration have to be thought out afresh and set on a right footing before it is too late. The Rowlands Committee pointed to the "plain fact" that Bengal has been not so much badly administered as under-administered. But



today the district administration is getting more complex and immeasurably more variegated and heavy. The District Officer remains at the top of this emerging pattern, with inadequate resources, antiquated methods and labour-

ing under imponderable pressure, diligently gnawing at his authority. He can carry out his responsibilities only if the district administration is streamlined and set in order before it becomes late.